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ABSTRACT

This booklet is part of a series of units designed to help students take and defend a position on public issues. The booklet is premised on the idea that the study of how various labor-related conflicts were resolved in the past can throw light on the problem of how they ought to be resolved here and now. That is why this particular unit looks at the history of organized labor rather than concentrating just on current labor-related issues. Terms are defined and questions for discussion are presented. The material stresses that the reason for discussing a public issue is not to win the argument, both to understand more clearly one's own views and the reasons that support them, as well as differing opinions. Students are encouraged to view questions as: (1) ethical or value questions; (2) questions of definition; and (3) questions involving facts and explanations. The document is divided into six sections. The first is an introduction that identifies the central issues of the unit and how they will be approached. The second discusses the nature of work from the beginnings of industry. Perspectives of three workers and a manager are compared. The third section, "Labor Organizes," gives an overview of the labor movement from 1840 to 1900, discusses problems faced by organizers, and describes the Pullman Strike of 1894. The fourth section discusses the relationship between the government and the unions from 1900 to 1940. This section ends with a description of the Battle at the Overpass, a violent encounter at Ford Motor Company in 1937. The fifth section presents an overview of labor from 1940 to the present, and the challenge that labor problems present to the government. The last section is a review. Each section contains exercises and discussion guides. In the accompanying teacher's guide the units use historical, fictional, and contemporary situations. They assist students in using a structured approach to issues analysis and in developing the skills of reasoned discussion. Teachers should view the materials provided as possible strategies for developing discussion of public issues, and should pick and choose among the materials according to their own goals. The guide provides section by section assignments and activities. An 11-item bibliography and handouts are included. (DK)

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Workers, Employers, and the Public Interest

Public Issues Series

THE RISE OF ORGANIZED LABOR: WORKERS, EMPLOYERS, AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Adapted from the Harvard Social Studies Project
by James Stewart and James R. Giese
Under the direction of
Donald W. Oliver and Fred M. Newmann

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What Is the Public Issues Series?

The Public Issues Series is a collection of units designed to help you take and defend a position on public issues. A public issue is a question involving a choice or decision over which there is disagreement. Public issues can be questions to be answered by all the citizens of a nation or community or by officials acting for them:

- Should school newspapers have the same right to freedom of the press as other newspapers?
- Should the United States provide aid to rebels in Communist nations in Latin America?

Public issues can also be phrased as choices for personal action:

- Should I write a letter to the principal to protest censorship?
- Should I send money to a group urging government funding for rebels in Communist nations in Latin America?

You might ask why this unit looks at the history of organized labor rather than concentrating just on current labor-related issues. By looking at how decisions were made in the past, we can see that history did not have to happen just the way it did. History is not simply a rushing stream of political, economic, and social events. The decisions people make shape history. In addition, many of the problems people face persist across time and place. By looking at how these conflicts were resolved in other times and places, we can clarify our positions on how they ought to be resolved here and now.

This unit, like others in the Public Issues Series, involves you as much more than a spectator to history. Instead, you will be a thinking, acting participant in the past, the present, and even the future.

What Are the Central Issues of This Unit?

The relationship between American labor unions and corporate management has been stormy for nearly 200 years. The first American unions were founded as early as 1790, at the very beginning of the change in manufacturing known as the Industrial Revolution. Like the English unions on which they were based, American unions were often banned by law. Unions organized later collapsed in political struggles or died as a result of "boom-and-bust" economic cycles. The worsening of working conditions as a result of industrialization brought greater public

sympathy for union efforts and, finally, legal recognition of workers' rights. The public supported many union efforts to win safe working conditions and a fair standard of living for all.

Yet the public has not been completely behind union efforts. Some Americans have become alarmed at the power of unions to close down steel mills, airlines, newspaper plants, schools – in an economy so interconnected that any stoppage can cause huge chain reactions. Other critics believe that both unions and management have become so big they can conspire together against the best economic interests of the general public. Concerns about workers' rights, the employer's proper gain from his or her property and enterprise, and the observance of the public interest continue to raise serious questions. These questions – the critical issues of this unit – are:

- What claims or grievances may workers legitimately express against their employers? What methods may workers legitimately use to influence the employer's policies?
- In what way may the activities of organized workers and of employers conflict with the public interest? In what ways should the power of an employer be restricted by law? In what ways should laws restrict the powers of organized workers?
- What are some effective ways of resolving disputes between workers and employers for their best interests and the best interests of the general public?

In this unit, you will seek answers to these questions, not as a mere reader but as a participant in cases that authentically represent several stages in U.S. history. Your answers – there are no "right" or "wrong" ones – will help you evaluate the positions unions and corporate management take.

How Will We Approach the Issues in This Unit?

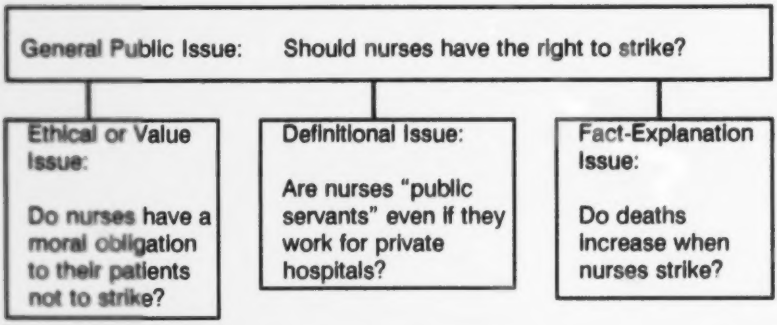
In this unit, you will take part in many discussions. Remember that not every discussion will resolve disagreements. It is often just as useful for people to learn to state their ideas with more precision and clarity and to discover precisely how their ideas differ from those of others.

No matter what the purpose of the discussion, it can become bogged down by smaller disagreements. Learning to identify the kinds of

questions being raised can help keep the discussion moving. In discussing public issues, people generally look at three kinds of questions:

- Ethical or value questions. These questions deal with judgments about what should or ought to be done – judgments about rightness and wrongness.
- Questions of definition. These questions revolve around the meaning of important words or phrases.
- Questions involving facts and explanations. These questions focus on disagreements about the descriptions or explanations of events.

Examples of each kind of question are given in the diagram below.


General Public Issue: Should nurses have the right to strike?
Ethical or Value Issue:
Do nurses have a moral obligation to their patients not to strike?
Definitional Issue:
Are nurses "public servants" even if they work for private hospitals?
Fact-Explanation Issue:
Do deaths increase when nurses strike?

You may be starting to see that dealing with public issues involves thinking on several levels at the same time:

- Thinking about the controversial topic at hand.
- Thinking about the process of clarifying the topic by identifying the kinds of questions being raised and using strategies for dealing with them.
- Thinking about the feelings and relationships we develop toward others in the conversation and how we can deal constructively with these feelings.

Remember that the reason for discussing a public issue is not to "win" the argument but to understand more clearly your own views and the reasons that support them, as well as differing opinions.

The Beginnings of Industry

The nature of work began to change in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Until that time, most workers had been involved in all stages of manufacturing a product. Many goods were made at home for individual use; master craftsmen and their journeymen and apprentices (assistants and trainees) produced goods for sale to others.

The system began to change first in England and then, more gradually, in the United States. Master craftsmen increased the number of journeymen working for them, giving each worker only part of the overall job of making the product. For example, one worker would make the soles of a pair of shoes, another the tongue, and so on. Merchants distributed raw materials to various homes, then collected and sold the finished products. Finally, workers were assembled with large supplies of raw materials in factories.

As the economy expanded, manufacturers were constantly looking for ways to increase productivity while lowering costs. Machines and new techniques helped factory owners speed up the work process so individual workers could make more goods in less time.

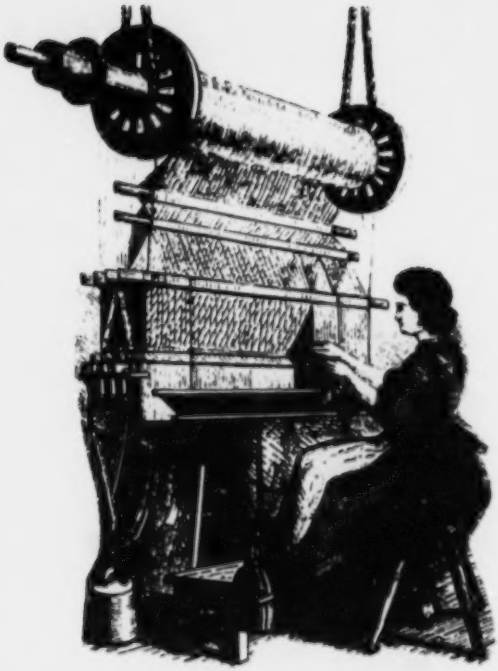
As you read the following description of America's first factories, think about ways in which work was changing and how those changes might create conflicts between workers and employers.

* * * * *

America's industrial revolution began in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, in 1790. Samuel Slater reconstructed from memory an Awkwright machine he had seen when he was a cotton-spinning apprentice in England. On the day after Christmas 1790, Slater's mill produced the first cotton yarn ever made automatically in America. It was of superior quality. Soon Slater was turning out yarn fine enough to be woven into a variety of clothing, most of which had previously been imported from England.

By the end of one month, Slater had nine employees, most of them children. Slater was following the practice of English millowners, who had found children more dexterous in factory work than adults; their small fingers sped nimbly over the moving parts of machinery.

With a small work force, Slater was able to take a fatherly attitude toward his child workers. He established a Sunday school for them and



provided instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. He paid the teacher out of his own pocket.

During the War of 1812, the industrial system became firmly established in New England as new factories rose to supply the needs of the war. The Boston Manufacturing Company, established at Waltham, Massachusetts, in 1813, became the first textile factory to conduct all operations for making cloth in one place under one management. By 1840, to take the leading industry as an example, there were 1,200 cotton factories in the United States, two-thirds of them in New England.

Some of the earliest and most famous textile mills were established by Boston investors in the 1820s at Lowell, Massachusetts. Michael Chevalier, a French visitor, came to Lowell in 1834 to study the effects of the mills on American life. Chevalier was impressed by what he saw:

> The cotton factories alone employ 6,000 persons in Lowell. Of this number, nearly 5,000 are young women from 17 to 21 years of age, the daughters of farmers from the different New England states....They are here far from their families and on their own. Seeing them pass through the streets, morning and evening and at mealtimes, neatly dressed; finding their scarfs, and shawls, and the green silk hoods which they wear as a

> shelter from the sun and dust (for Lowell is not yet paved) hanging in the factories between vases of flowers and shrubs which they cultivate, I said to myself this, then, is not Manchester. [Manchester, England, known at the time as a grimy and crowded industrial city.] When I was informed of the rate of their wages, I understood that it was not at all like Manchester.

The wages of the Lowell mill girls averaged from $3 to $3.50 for a six-day week. Skilled workers made as much as $6 a week. These were grand amounts compared to the factory pay for women in Europe, which was seldom more than $1 a week. The cost of necessities, furthermore, was much lower than it was in Europe. Thus, the typical Lowell mill girl might save a "little fortune" of $250 or more in the four years before she quit work to marry.

Chevalier was also interested in Lowell's novel system of lodging houses:

> The manufacturing companies exercise the most careful supervision over these girls....Twelve years ago Lowell did not exist. When, therefore, the factories were set up, it became necessary to provide lodgings for the workers. Each company has built for this purpose a number of houses within its own limits, to be used exclusively as boarding houses for them.
>
> These are under the care of a matron who is paid by the company at the rate of one dollar and a quarter a week for each boarder, that sum being taken out of the weekly wage of the girls. These housekeepers, who are generally widows, are each responsible for the conduct of her boarders, and they are themselves subject to the control and supervision of the company in the management of their little communities.
>
> Each company has its rules and regulations, which are not merely paper laws but are carried into execution with all that spirit of vigilant perseverance that characterizes the Yankees.

The French visitor cited the first article of the general rules of one of the companies:

> All persons employed by the Company must devote themselves assiduously to their duty during working-hours. They must be capable of doing the work which they undertake....They must on all occasions, both in their words and their action, show that they are penetrated by a laudable love of temperance and virtue, and animated by a sense of their moral and social obligations....

Among other things, the young women were required to live in one of the company's boarding houses, to be home each night by 10, and to attend church services regularly.

Chevalier compared Lowell to a Spanish town with its convents and spoke of the workers as the "nuns of Lowell." Though he was charmed, he was also doubtful about the city's future. He foresaw, correctly, a time when the health, education, or moral behavior of workers—men, women, and a greatly increased number of young children—would be of less concern to American factory owners.

Persisting Question of History

Defining Standard of Living. From evidence above, would you say that factory workers in the early 19th century had a high or low standard of living? Before answering this question, try to define what you mean by "standard of living." Can you determine someone's standard of living without knowing about costs at the time? Why or why not?

Identifying Employers' Attitudes. How did the factory owners in Lowell view their workers? How did this attitude influence their actions? Do you think employers today hold similar attitudes? Give evidence to support your answer.

FOUR PERSPECTIVES: THE WORKERS AND THE MANAGER

As manufacturing evolved, many people came to fear that the new age was creating a permanent class of demoralized and poverty-stricken workers. By the late 1800s, a growing share of the work force settled in large towns and cities. These areas could be frightening and hostile places for both American workers and newly-arrived immigrants.

This section contains readings about three laborers and a manager. As you read, look for evidence of how the changing nature of work was affecting workers and their relationship with management.

The Case of Sara Frowne

This reading is an excerpt from an interview with a young Polish immigrant. Sara Frowne came to the United States with her mother, who got a job in a factory. The 13-year-old Sara found work as a domestic. A short while later, however, her mother fell ill and died. Sara decided to learn a trade and go to school at night.

* * * * *

So I went to work in Allen street [Manhattan] in what they call a sweatshop, making skirts by machine. I was new at the work and the foreman scolded me a great deal.

"Now, then," he would say, "this place is not for you to be looking around in. Attend to your work. That is what you have to do."

I did not know at first that you must not look around and talk, and I made many mistakes with the sewing, so that I was often called a "stupid animal." But I made $4 a week by working six days in the week.

I lived at this time with a girl named Ella, who worked in the same factory and made $5 a week. We had the room all to ourselves, paying $1.50 a week for it, and doing light housekeeping. It was in Allen street, and the window looked out of the back, which was good, because there was an elevated railroad in front, and in summer time a great deal of

---

Excerpted from "The Story of a Sweatshop Girl," The Independent 54, no. 2808 (September 25, 1902), pp. 2279-2282.

dust and dirt came in at the front windows. We were on the fourth story and could see all that was going on in the back room of the houses behind us, and early in the morning the sun used to come in our window.

We did our cooking on an oil stove, and lived well, as this list of our expenses for one week will show:

Ella and Sadie for Food (One Week)

Tea	$0.06
Cocoa	.10
Bread and rolls	.40
Canned vegetables	.20
Potatoes	.10
Milk	.21
Fruit	.20
Butter	.15
Meat	.60
Fish	.15
Laundry	.25
Total	$2.42
Add rent	1.50
Grand Total	$3.92

...It cost me $2 a week to live, and I had a dollar a week to spend on clothing and pleasure, and saved the other dollar. I went to night school, but it was hard work learning at first as I did not know much English.

Two years ago I came to this place, Brownsville, where so many of my people are, and where I have friends. I got work in a factory making underskirts – all sorts of cheap underskirts...I earned $4.50 a week and lived on $2 a week, the same as before....

It isn't piecework in our factory, but one is paid by the amount of work done just the same. So it is like piecework. All the hands get different amounts, some as low as $3.50 and some of the men as high as $16 a week. The factory is in the third story of a brick building. It is in a room 20 feet long and 14 broad. There are 14 machines in it. I and the daughter of the people with whom I live work two of these machines. The other operators are all men, some young and some old.

At first a few of the young men were rude. When they passed me they would touch my hair and talk about my eyes and my red cheeks, and make jokes. I cried and said that if they did not stop I would leave the place. The boss said that that should not be, that no one must annoy me. Some of the other men stood up for me, too, especially Henry, who said two or three times that he wanted to fight. Now the men all treat me very nicely. It was just that some of them did not know better, not being educated.

I get up at half-past five o'clock every morning and make myself a cup of coffee on the oil stove. I eat a bit of bread and perhaps some fruit and then go to work. Often I get there soon after six o'clock so as to be in good time, tho[ugh] the factory does not open till seven. I have heard that there is a sort of clock that calls you at the very time you want to get up, but I can't believe that because I don't see how the clock would know.

At seven o'clock we all sit down to our machines and the boss brings to each one the pile of work that he or she is to finish during the day, what they call in English their "stint." This pile is put down beside the machine and as soon as a skirt is done it is laid on the other side of the machine. Sometimes the work is not all finished by six o'clock and then the one who is behind must work overtime. Sometimes one is finished ahead of time and gets away at four or five o'clock, but generally we are not done till six o'clock.

The machines go like mad all day, because the faster you work the more money you get. Sometimes in my haste I get my finger caught and the needle goes right through it. It goes so quick, tho[ugh], that it does not hurt much. I bind the finger up with a piece of cotton and go on

working. We all have accidents like that. Where the needle goes through the nail it makes a sore finger, or where it splinters a bone it does much harm. Sometimes a finger has to come off. Generally, tho[ugh], one can be cured by a salve.

All the time we are working the boss walks about examining the finished garments and making us do them over again if they are not just right. So we have to be careful as well as swift. But I am getting so good at the work that within a year I will be making $7 a week, and then I can save at least $3.50 a week. I have over $200 saved now.

The machines are all run by foot power, and at the end of the day one feels so weak that there is a great temptation to lie right down and sleep. But you must go out and get air, and have some pleasure. So instead of lying down I go out, generally with Henry. Sometimes we go to Coney Island, where there are good dancing places, and sometimes we go to Ulmer park to picnics....

For the last two winters I have been going to night school at Public School 84 on Glenmore avenue. I have learned reading, writing, and arithmetic. I can read quite well in English now and I look at the newspapers every day. I read English books, too, sometimes....

We have just finished a strike in our business. It spread all over and the United Brotherhood of Garment Workers was in it. That takes in the cloakmakers, coatmakers, and all the others. We struck for shorter hours, and after being out four weeks won the fight. We only have to work nine and a half hours a day and we get the same pay as before. So the union does good after all in spite of what some poeple say against it – that it just takes our money and does nothing.

I pay 25 cents a month to the union, but I do not begrudge that because it is for our benefit. The next strike is going to be for a raise of wages, which we all ought to have.... There is a little expense for charity, too. If any worker is injured or sick we all give money to help.

Questions for Conversation

1. The passage below describes the work of shoemakers before industrialization. Compare Sara's experience in the factory with the way in which work was done by shoemakers in small shops. How would the differences you identified affect workers?

> In these old shops, years ago, one man owned the shop; he took in work and three, four, five, or six others, neighbors, came in there and sat down and made shoes right in their laps, and there was no machinery. Everybody was at liberty to talk; they were all politicians...Of course, under these conditions, there was absolute freedom and exchange of ideas, they naturally would become more intelligent than shoe workers can at the present time, when they are driving each man to see how many shoes he can handle, and where he is surrounded by noisy machinery.

2. Some workers today are paced by a computer. For example, as soon as a telephone operator finishes one call, the computer cycles another call to him or her; the operator cannot take a break without logging off. How is this modern pacing similar to or different from Sara's experience? How do you think this pacing affects workers?

Steel Workers in Industrial America

The industrial age in the United States was the age of steel. In 1870, the U.S. produced about one-sixth as much pig iron as Great Britain. By 1900, it made more steel than Britain, France, and Germany combined. This was accomplished by new techniques, equipment, and cost-cutting measures, many developed by Andrew Carnegie. His innovations reduced the price of steel from $85 to less than $20 a ton, making American steel the cheapest but best in the world. Yet there was a human cost involved in this business. The following describes life in Homestead, Pennsylvania, the site of Carnegie's mills, around 1900.

Excerpted from Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town, by Margaret F. Byington (New York: Survey Associates, 1910), pp. 35-37, 171-179.

If you are near the mill in the late afternoon you will see a procession, an almost steady stream of men, each carrying the inevitable bucket, hurrying towards the great buildings for the night's work. A little later the tide turns and back come the day men, walking slowly and wearily towards home and supper.

Thus the life of the town keeps time with the rhythm of the mill. This is brought out also by the way the town reckons dates from the year of the great strike; by the trend of its development, conditioned by dependence upon one industrial enterprise owned by outsiders; and most clearly of all by the part the mill work plays in the lives of the men....

The conditions under which the work is carried on seem to an outsider fairly intolerable. The din in the great vaulted sheds makes speech hard. Men who have worked near the engines... sometimes become almost oblivious to ordinary sound. Some work where the heat is intense; and before the open doors of furnaces full of white-hot metal they must wear smoked glasses to temper the glare. This heat, exhausting in summer, makes a man in winter doubly susceptible to the cold without. While for the men directing the processes the physical exertion is often not great, most of the laborers perform heavy manual toil. And everywhere is the danger of accident from constantly moving machinery, from bars of glowing steel, from engines moving along the tracks in the yard. The men, of course, grow used to these dangers, but a new peril lies in the carelessness that results from such familiarity, for human nature cannot be eternally on guard....

The nature of the work, with the heat and its inherent hazard, makes much of it exhausting. Yet these men for the most part keep it up twelve hours a day. It is uneconomical to have the plant shut down. In order that the mills may run practically continuously, the twenty-four hours is divided between two shifts. The greater number of men employed in making steel (as distinct from the clerical-staff) work half of the time at night, the usual arrangement being for a man to work one week on the day and the next on the night shift. At the request of the men, the night turn is made longer, so that they can have the full evening to themselves the other week. Their hours on the day turn, therefore, are from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; this leaves thirteen and one-half hours for the night shift. In certain departments the regular processes are continued straight through Sunday and the crews work the full seven days out of seven.... Moreover, a majority of the men have to be on duty either Saturday night or Sunday night, thus breaking into the day of rest.

These are the demands which the mill makes on the Homestead men. Even the details of family life depend on whether "the mister" is working day turn or night turn; and the long shifts determine the part the steel worker plays in his household and also in his community. Financially, all time is marked off by the fortnightly "pay Friday." On that night stores are open all the evening. The streets are filled with music, and the German bands go from saloon to saloon reaping a generous harvest.... It is the night for settling scores, and the bills which have accumulated for two weeks are paid and a fresh household account opened.

A further depressing result of the overwork in the mills is the mental fatigue which accompanies it. The men are too tired to take an active part in family life; they are usually ready after smoking a pipe to go to bed. They have small interest in outside matters and consequently make little effort to increase the provision of amusements in the town, a condition from which their wives and children suffer. Again, with the broken Sunday, which is due either to work on that day or to work Saturday night or Sunday night, it is easy to drift away from church....

All this is bound up with perhaps the most serious outcome of conditions in the mill, the tendency to develop in the men a spirit of taking things as they come....Men weary with long hours of work, men who have been refused any share in determining the conditions under which they work, are not prompted to seize opportunities...to study and work up [improve themselves]....

Questions for Conversation

1. How did work in the steel mills affect the workers' family and civic lives? How might such effects influence society in general?

2. What effect does shift work have on the individual? Do you know anyone who does shift work? Does it affect their lives in any of the ways described in the reading?

The Mule Spinner's Testimony

However hard the work was, unemployment was a much greater problem for, and much more feared by, most laborers. In the testimony that follows, a mule spinner—a textile worker who took twisted yarn from a machine called a mule*—described such fear to a U.S. Senate committee investigating labor-management relations in 1883.*

* * * * *

Q. What is your business? **A.** I am a mule-spinner by trade. I have worked at it since I have been in this country—11 years.

Q. Are you a married man? **A.** Yes, sir; I am a married man; have a wife and two children. I am not very well educated. I went to work when I was young, and have been working ever since in the cotton business; went to work when I was about eight or nine years old. I was going to state how I live. My children get along very well in summertime, on account of not having to buy fuel or shoes or one thing and another. I earn $1.50 a day and can't afford to pay a very big house rent. I pay $1.50 a week for rent, which comes to about $6 a month....

Q. Do you have work right along? **A.** No, sir, since that strike we had down in Fall River [Massachusetts] about three years ago I have not worked much more than half the time and that has brought my circumstances down very much....And another thing that helped to keep me down: A year ago this month I buried the oldest boy we had, and that brings things very expensive on a poor man. For instance, it will cost there, to bury a body, about $100....Doctor's bills are very heavy—about $2 a visit; and if a doctor comes once a day for two or three weeks it is quite a pile for a poor man to pay.

Q. They charge you as much as they charge people of more means? **A.** They charge as much as if I was the richest man in the city, except that some of them might be generous once in a while and put it down a little in the end....

Q. How much money have you got? **A.** I have not got a cent in the house; didn't have when I came out this morning.

Q. How much money have you had within three months? **A.** I have had about $16 inside of three months....

Q. Do you think you have had $150 within a year? **A.** No, sir.

Q. Have you had $125? **A.** Well, I would figure it up if I had time. The 13 weeks is all I have had.

Q. The 13 weeks and the $16 you have mentioned? **A.** Yes, sir.

Q. That would be somewhere about $133, if you had not lost any time? **A.** Yes, sir....

Q. How many pounds of beef-steak have you had in your family, that you bought for your own home consumption within this year that we have been speaking of? **A.** I don't think there has been five pounds of beefsteak.

Q. You have had a little pork steak? **A.** We had a half pound of pork steak yesterday; I don't know when we had any before.

Q. What other kinds of meat have you had within a year? **A.** Well, we have had corn beef twice—I think I remember this year—on Sunday, for dinner.

Q. What have you eaten? **A.** Well, bread mostly, when we could get it; we sometimes couldn't make out to get that, and have had to go without a meal.

Q. Has there been any day in the year that you have had to go without anything to eat? **A.** Yes, sir, several days.

Q. More than one day at a time? **A.** No.

Q. How about the children and your wife—did they go without anything to eat too? **A.** My wife went out this morning and went to a neighbor's and got a loaf of bread and fetched it home, and when she got home the children were crying for something to eat.

Q. Have the children had anything to eat today except that, do you think? **A.** They had that loaf of bread—I don't know what they have had since then, if they have had anything....

Q. Have the children gone without a meal at any time during the year? **A.** They have gone without bread some days, but we have sometimes got meal and made porridge of it.

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Q. What kind of meal? **A.** Sometimes Indian meal, and sometimes oatmeal.

Q. Meal stirred up in hot water? **A.** Yes, sir.

Q. Is it cold weather down there now? **A.** It is very cold now.

Q. What have the children got on in the way of clothing? **A.** They have got along very nicely all summer, but now they are beginning to feel quite sickly. One has one shoe on, a very poor one, and a slipper that was picked up somewhere. The other has two odd shoes on, with the heel out. He has got cold and is sickly now.

Q. Have they any stockings? **A.** He has got stockings, but his feet comes through them for there is a hole in the bottom of the shoe.

Q. What have they got on the rest of their person? **A.** Well, they have a little calico shirt – what should be a shirt; it is sewed up in some shape – and one little petticoat, and a kind of little dress.

Q. You had $1 or $2 worth of coal last winter? **A.** I think it was a quarter of a ton, and I believe it was $2.25 worth.

Q. Is that all you have had? **A.** That is all I had last winter. All the rest I picked up – wood.

Q. You say that a good many others are situated just like you are? **A.** Yes, sir; I should say as many as a thousand down in Fall River are just in the same shape, if not worse; though they can't be much worse. I have heard many women say they would sooner be dead than living. I don't know what is wrong, but something is wrong. There is an overflow of labor in Fall River.

Q. Do you see any way out of your troubles – what are you going to do for a living – or do you expect to have to stay right there? **A.** I can't run around with my family.

Q. You have nowhere to go to, and no way of getting there if there was any place to go to? **A.** No, sir; I have no means nor anything so I am obliged to remain there and try to pick up something as I can.

Questions for Conversation

1. Imagine that you are a worker of the 1890s. Make a list of specific grievances you think employers generally should act to correct. Are these the same grievances that might have been expressed to employers by the factory girls of Lowell? Why or why not?

2. Choose an occupation of today with which you are familiar. Make a list of grievances a person in this occupation might express to his/her employer. How do these grievances compare to those that might have been expressed by 19th-century workers you have read about?

Mr. Livermore's Testimony

Thomas L. Livermore, of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company of Manchester, New Hampshire, was a member of the new middle class. By the late 19th century, this group—the managers, the clerks, the junior executives, and the professional people—had grown in numbers and influence.

People like Mr. Livermore were paid from $1,600 to $2,500 a year. They lived in modest homes or comfortable apartments. They valued upholstered furniture, heavy draperies, marble-topped tables, and living rooms cluttered with bric-a-brac as evidence of their dignity. Their dress was practical but in good taste.

They benefited most from devices making life easier; the telephone, the electric light, paved streets, and sewage disposal. With their adequate salaries and time off from work, they were able to take advantage of improved educational and cultural facilities.

As a mill manager, Livermore had probably attained a much higher status and standard of living than his parents. And, if he was typical, he was educating his children to strive for a still higher place in the world.

On October 12, 1883, Livermore appeared before the U.S. Senate Committee on labor-management relations. His appearance came just about a week before the testimony of the unemployed mule-spinner, whose story you have just read.

Q. What is the general health of your employees?

A. I think that the general health may be said to be good. It is the desire of the mill managers in this part of the country, generally, I believe, to light, heat, ventilate, and care for their mills generally so as to make them as healthy and agreeable as circumstances will allow; for, other considerations not taken into account, the best mill in this respect would produce the best and the most cloth. Bad ventilation and discomfort generally has, I think, a palpable effect upon the quantity and character of product of the mill. The operative [machine operator] working in a well-lighted, well-heated, and well-ventilated mill would retain his strength and spirits to the end of the day, when one working in a mill which was not well-lighted and heated and ventilated would flag toward the end of the day and not be at his best as a laborer....

I am informed, and have no doubt from my investigation that it is true, that 40 years ago the hours of labor averaged 14 1/2 per day in the mills; that they were gradually reduced by the voluntary act of the mill managers until they reached the limit which I have given as that of today [10 3/4 hours]. I suppose this reduction was made possible, and was in a large degree due to the improvements in machinery and methods of manufacture...

Q. What is your knowledge of the state of feeling among your operatives, as a general fact, as to their satisfaction with their condition, their living, and their wages, their contentment or discontent or distrust, or any want of confidence in their employers?

A. I think that as a whole the working people in our employ are not discontented with their pay or their condition. Of course, I suppose that everyone on earth who is employed would be glad if he could get more wages than he does get, but I think that, generally, in this place, the people are contented...

Q. What is your observation as to the length of time or the hours of labor that the operative is capable of enduring without physical or other injury?

A. My belief is that he can work ten and three-quarter hours on an average without injury, and I may say that in a limited degree I had some experience myself as a youth, for I worked at a mechanical employment for a while; but of course my judgment must be formed mainly from my observation here. If one goes upon the main street here in the evening—

Elm Street – he will see the sidewalks crowded as densely as Broadway, New York, by the mill operatives who have finished their work and got their suppers and come out to promenade and see the shops and each other, and they seem to be merry and happy and laughing....Now, if it were the fact that they were prostrated and tired out by the hours of labor, they would not be out, I think....

Q. Suppose a system were introduced of paying substantially by the hour or by the piece, and it prevailed all through your entire system of work, and then the proposition was made to the operatives to absolutely limit the hours of labor to ten, nine, or eight hours. Do you think that the operatives themselves would approve of that proposition, or would they prefer to work longer and get more pay?

A. I do not think they would approve of it....

Q. I asked the question because the suggestion has been made by many labor reformers, as they are termed, that even six hours, considering the increased productive power of machinery or of the human being and machinery combined, would be as long as laboring people ought to be expected to work – as long as the interests of society require that they should and inasmuch as there are many unemployed people, a reduction of the hours of labor would give something to others to do. The question whether it could be made to work practically is the serious thing.

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A. I do not believe at all in such theories. I think that at least in a free country like this, with thousands of miles of land to be taken up in a vast area of country which is inhabited by people occupied in industrial pursuits, and the great variety of employments to be found in this country, it is perfectly safe for at least the lifetime of this generation to leave the question of how a man shall work, and how long he shall work, and where he shall work, and what wages he shall get, to himself....

Q. Won't you please tell us your experience with the question of child labor; how it is, and to what extent it exists here; why it exists, and whether, as it is actually existing here, it is a hardship on a child or on a parent; or whether there is any evil in that direction that should be remedied?

A. There is a certain class of labor in the mills which, to put it in a very common phrase, consists mainly in running about the floor – where there is not as much muscular exercise required as a child would put forth in play, and a child can do it about as well as a grown person can do it – not quite as much of it, but somewhere near it, and with proper supervision of older people, the child serves the purpose. That has led to the employment of children in the mills.... There is such a thing as too much education for working people sometimes. I do not mean to say by that that I discourage education to any person on earth, or that I think that with good sense any amount of education can hurt anyone, but I have seen cases where young people were spoiled for labor by being educated to a little too much refinement....

Questions for Conversation

1. On what evidence did the mill manager base his belief that workers were contented?

2. On what grounds did he object to further cuts in the length of the working day?

3. What, if any, objections did he have to education for children? How do you think his position in the mill influenced his views?

Persisting Questions of History

Weighing Evidence. Compare the testimony of the mill manager with the stories of the three workers. List specific evidence of hardship and suffering from the workers' cases. What kind of behavior or statements by the workers would have given persuasive evidence that they were dissatisfied? Is there any such evidence in the cases?

Evaluating Policy. On what grounds do you agree or disagree with this position: "The employer who owns the plant and property may establish whatever wages and working conditions he or she wishes. If workers don't accept the employer's terms, they can go elsewhere."

Judging Limits of Ownership. In each of the following situations, a property owner justifies his or her action by saying, "Although people may not like this, it is my property, and on my property I may do what I wish." Which actions listed below do you think should be prohibited by law? Discuss your reasons.

- A homeowner lets his lawn grow three feet high, to the annoyance of his neighbors.
- A business woman decides, over the protests of the local merchants association, to break the uniform white-brick architecture of the shopping district by installing a colorful metal front on her store.
- A high school student gives a party at his home at which liquor is served with his parents' permission.
- A factory owner orders scrap burned in open incinerators behind the shop buildings.
- A restaurant owner bars all people under 16 from her place of business.
- A factory owner forbids any gathering of more than five employees during coffee breaks or lunch hour.
- A factory owner refuses to hire women workers.

In any case where you have decided that the action should be prohibited, indicate the other value (such as public health, community morals, equality of opportunity) that you consider superior to the rights of private property.

Overview: 1840-1900

Unions for all workers or only the skilled? Unions for politics or social reform or "bread and butter"? As this reading indicates, early workers' organizations had a hard time agreeing on their main purpose.

* * * * *

American workers realized early that they needed organizations to match the new wealth and strength of employers. During the first half of the 19th century, they tried to form unions, many with national goals.

Philadelphia gave birth in the 1820s to the National Trades Union, which spread to New York and Boston. Philadelphia workers made a parallel thrust in politics. Their Workingmen's party won quick victory in city elections. Within a few years, workers had entered politics in 15 states and were publishing 50 newspapers to express their views. They demanded higher wages and such reforms as the ten-hour day.

The Workingmen's parties had goals that went far beyond wages and working conditions, however. They also asked for such things as free public schools, voting rights for women, government regulation of banks, court reform, and the abolition of capital punishment. They backed ideas as radical as abolishing all private ownership of property.

Many local unions of skilled craftsmen were able to survive the troubles caused by such divisions of effort and by the economic "booms and busts," such as the panics of 1837 and 1857. Efforts to form national unions were much shorter-lived.

The first successful national unions were formed soon after the Civil War. Leaders of both the National Labor Union and the Knights of Labor believed that only a single, nationwide union could really improve working class life. While safer working conditions, shorter hours, and better wages were worthy goals, the unions also believed that only fundamental changes in American society could end the "wage system," which oppressed the workers.

William Sylvis (founder of the National Labor Union) believed that women and blacks must be made a part of the working class political agenda. "As men struggling to maintain an equitable standard of wages and to dignify labor," he said, "we owe it to consistency, if not to humanity, to guard and protect the right of female labor." Partly as a

A Knights of Labor meeting

result of Sylvis' argument, four women attended the 1868 NLU convention as delegates. Kate Mullaney was chosen as an officer and was placed in charge of the effort to unionize women.

At the same time, Sylvis addressed the conscious exclusion of blacks from the American labor movement. White workers shared the prevalent racial views of the times, but also resented blacks because they were often hired at lower wages and were employed to break strikes by white workers. The NLU itself refused to seat black delegates until 1869, but there was strong sentiment to use labor reform as a vehicle to promote racial harmony.

The NLU did not lead the labor movement for long. It soon was overshadowed by the Knights of Labor, which was formed in 1869. The Knights, too, believed in a national organization open to all, regardless of sex, race, or trade. They hoped to be an agent of social change, turning the United States into a cooperative, classless society. The union was open to all workers except doctors, lawyers, bankers, and liquor dealers.

The Knights of Labor favored arbitration (peaceful discussion and settlement of issues) rather than strikes (walking off the job until demands are met). Ironically, a string of strike victories brought the Knights of Labor to the peak of their success. Most notable was the strike of 1885 against the Southwest System of railroads. The railroads, controlled by the powerful financier Jay Gould, had ordered pay cuts and started a systematic layoff of union members. National headquarters of the Knights of Labor reluctantly agreed to support a strike called by district leaders.

Gould, alarmed at the violence of the strike and the prospect that his entire system would be closed down, came to the bargaining table. He agreed to stop firing union members and to rehire those who had been fired. The Knights agreed, in return, to give notice of any future strike threat.

The victory was a stimulus to union recruiting efforts. Between July 1885 and July 1886 membership in the Knights leaped from 111,000 to more than 700,000.

The Knights, however, were simply climbing toward the edge of a precipice. Southwest System railroad workers struck again when a foreman was fired. Jay Gould accused Knights leader Terrence V. Powderly of violating the strike-notice pledge and hired strikebreakers and Pinkerton detectives to fight the union. The Knights of Labor lost face by abandoning the strike.

Meanwhile, Powderly denied support to the eight-hour-day movement, started by the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions. This rival organization, established in 1881, stressed organization by craftsmen—such as carpenters, plumbers, machinists—rather than by all workers. Thousands of Knights spurned Powderly's position to join a one-day general strike called by the federation for May 1, 1886.

That fateful month produced the bloody Haymarket riot. Strikers at the McCormick Harvesting Machine Co. in Chicago had been fired on by police and private detectives who were protecting strikebreakers—"scabs." The strikers called a protest rally for May 4 in Haymarket Square. Just as a column of policeman arrived to break up the rally, a dynamite bomb was hurled through the air. Eight policemen were fatally injured in the explosion and 66 were wounded. The incident created a national fear of anarchism and socialism in the unions.

By 1888 membership in the Knights of Labor had slumped to one-third of its peak total. By 1891 the organization no longer bothered to publish membership figures.

In its place rose the most enduring of U.S. labor organization, the American Federation of Labor. The new federation was established in December 1886 at Columbus, Ohio. Samuel Gompers, its first president, insisted that it should be a crafts federation recognizing the autonomy of each trade or skill. He also wanted a financially sound organization with member unions paying adequate dues to national benefit funds. Finally, he believed the AFL should be non-political, avoiding political movements and social theories to concentrate on wages, hours, and working conditions.

The AFL stressed practical goals that would lead to an immediate improvement of its members' working situation and standard of living. Even though the union was criticized by other workers for its approach, by World War I the wages of AFL members had increased by a third and their work week was shortened from an average of 54 hours to 49 hours. However, only 10 percent of the work force was in a union, and a smaller percentage yet in the AFL. While its strategy appeared to meet the needs of its members, it did not meet the needs of those outside.

As a result, some labor leaders began to think again of an alternative, the industrial union, to which all workers in an industry would belong, regardless of their particular trade or skill. Eugene V. Debs was an important figure in this cause. Long active in a craft union, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, Debs thought a totally integrated railroad union in which brakemen, firemen, engineers, and common laborers were equal, was a better idea. In 1893, Debs organized the American Railway Union.

Questions for Conversation

1. Why do you think local unions were more successful than national unions early in the labor movement? Can you think of any similar successes for local organizations in recent years?

2. Do you believe the idealism of the NLU and the Knights was practical? Why or why not?

3. What policies did Samuel Gompers emphasize to improve the effectiveness of the American Federation of Labor?

The Problems of Organizing

As soon as workers began to band together in labor unions, employers used a number of devices to curtail those organizations. They often required potential employees to sign "yellow dog" contracts, in which they promised not to join a union. They would fire and often blacklist employees who were known union advocates. Employers also hired "scabs" to break strikes. Occasionally, they would hire such agencies as the Pinkertons to protect their property against striking workers.

The Pinkertons

The following is an excerpt from a congressional report on this practice.

* * * * *

From the testimony it appears that the Pinkerton Detective Agency was first established in 1850...The agency now has in its employ from 600 to 800 persons, owns about 250 Winchester rifles, 400 revolvers of different kinds, and other weapons in proportion.

The Union Pacific, The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy, the Lake Shore, and the New York Central Railroad companies are among the number that have employed and used such guards....At the time of such employment said corporations were encountering serious opposition in the operation of their road and in the running of trains, from their striking employes [sic]. The guards were armed and in most if not in all cases were sworn in as deputy sheriffs and clothed with police powers. In a few instances serious collisions took place between them and the striking employes or their friends....Whether the employment of these guards provoked breaches of the peace or caused the destruction of property is a question upon which no definite opinion can be expressed.

The existence of such an organization as the Pinkerton Agency, composed of men of superior courage but doubtful discretion...may well excite feelings of apprehension and danger....The resort to such force has a demoralizing influence. It blunts the moral responsibility of citizenship and thus fosters the growth of the belief that "brute force" and not "respect for law" is the foundation of popular government.

From U.S. House, Reports of the Committees of the House, "Employment of Pinkerton Detectives" (1893), pp. 137-38.

Questions for Conversation

1. In what instances do you think an employer would be justified in hiring agents such as those employed by Pinkerton?

2. Do you agree that the presence of the Pinkertons might create "feelings of apprehension and danger"? If this is true, what might be the result?

The Case of Joe Schelker

Given the hardships of work in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it may be hard to imagine workers rejecting unions. Yet this did happen, in part because of the strong tradition that success was dependent on individual hard work and talent. Many workers were simply grateful to be working steadily. Others believed that their stint in the mines or the factories was only a temporary condition; they therefore tolerated conditions that others might have found unbearable. Many believed that unions would mean only personal trouble. Employers engaged in various anti-union activities. The following story depicts the problems of a union organizer, who faced apathy, fear—and pride.

* * * * *

Seven o'clock. Already the employees of Asterman's Clothing Factory had been at work for two hours. Joseph Schelker, middle-aged, huskily built, shoulders slightly rounded as a result of years spent at a bench cutting fabric, made his way toward the shop along the dingy streets. Grocerymen and hot-lunch peddlers were just preparing their stands for the day's business. Soon the city would be all soot and smells.

Schelker had to make his visit early in the day; Asterman never came in until almost noon, and Schelker knew the foreman, Berman. Berman did not agree with what Schelker was doing, but he wouldn't prevent him from talking with a couple of the workers. Berman and Schelker had once been cutters at the same bench, exchanging stories about the old country while their fingers measured and snipped grey serge for ready-made suits. Berman had gone on to become a foreman, Schelker a labor organizer.

This case is fictional, but it authentically represents conditions of the time.

As he drew near the shop, the air filled with hateful memories. Since he had become an organizer, Schelker had not spent a full day in a tailoring shop. Yet every visit he made recalled his years of tedious labor: 14 hours a day, 6 days a week; net result—a sore back and 10 or 12 dollars in his pocket. America, land of promise! For Schelker that promise could never be fulfilled so long as the bosses took $100 a week to their 15-room homes while the tailors, to earn $12 a week, had to carry night work back to their shabby tenements.

Schelker turned into the alley that led to the shop's entrance. The shop was over a stable. Odors of manure and the gasoline used in pressing wafted along the narrow passage. He went up the stairs, but didn't knock, since the hiss of the presses drowned out all but the most insistent noise, and entered. It could have been any one of the hundreds of sweatshops Schelker had visited over the past six months. The workers, almost all of them immigrants, were half-naked in the heat. They bent over their machines, working grimly.

Ventilation was bad, and there was only one toilet for the 50 or 60 workmen. The floor was strewn with scraps of fabric and refuse from many hastily eaten lunches. Schelker picked his way over to the other side of the room where the foreman was standing.

"Hullo, Berman, how're you? The wife and kids?"

"Schelker! Good to see you. Missed you since you gave up working for a living. Wife's the same—still nagging. Kids are great, though. You should see my boy, Mike."

"Say, Berman, do you think I could just wander around and talk to a few of the men? Promise I won't keep 'em for more than a minute."

"Schelker, I wish you'd give up this union stuff. But I don't care if you talk around. Don't make no difference to my job, and you won't make no headway here. They're too busy cuttin' cloth to worry about such nonsense."

While he talked, Schelker was sizing up the place, deciding on his targets. He knew he couldn't push Berman too far: three men at most. If one of those three could be convinced to help start a local, it would be a good morning.

He walked over to a fellow who looked Italian. He tapped him on the shoulder: "Hello, brother, could I chew the fat with you for a couple of minutes?"

The man had fine, intelligent features. His long fingers were feeding the fabric into the machine, always near yet always evading the stabs of the needle.

"Too busy, can't talk." He hardly looked at Scheiker.

"Won't keep you long," the organizer emphasized.

The Italian stopped pushing the treadle and swiveled around on the bench.

"I am Vincent Nardelli."

"Scheiker. Joe Scheiker. Please to meet you, Vince."

Nardelli wiped the sweat from his forehead. "Well, Mr. Scheiker, what do you want?" His English was good; he studies at night, Scheiker thought.

"Call me Joe, willya? I come here to talk to you about organizing. We want to make 'em fix up this shop. We think...."

But he was cut off.

"Don't talk to me no more, Mr. Scheiker...Joe. I don't want to hear no more. I didn't come to the States of America to organize; I want to make money and live decent. You just cause trouble. Don't work, just cause the trouble for the workers. I send some money back to Italia every week. I'm doing all right. If you a nice fellow, you go away now. I gotta work."

Time was running out. Scheiker thought fast. "Listen, Vince, did you come to America to be made to work like a slave...?"

"You listen, Mr. Joe. You a smart-lookin' man. Don't bother me. I don't argue with the bosses and I take home my money. It's all right here; at least I got a job, and you better leave me alone to do it."

Lost cause for now at least, thought Scheiker. Not allowing his impatience to show, he wished Nardelli luck and moved on.

He walked over to a cutter at the opposite end of the room. The workers seemed oblivious of his presence. Not one looked up. The man wielding a large pair of shears along the edge of the pattern was about Scheiker's own age.

"Hello, brother. Name's Joe Scheiker. Mind if we talk a minute?" Scheiker received a grin.

"Sure, we talk. Can't cut all day without a break. I'm Harry Corbett."

Encouraged by the man's friendliness, Scheiker did not beat about the bush: "Harry, I'm here to convince a few of the fellows to start organizing. I got plans for a meeting next Monday."

The smile left Corbett's face. He looked anxiously at the piece of cloth he had been cutting. Scheiker's optimism vanished but he went on.

"There's no reason to work in filth for 12 measly...."

"Scheiker, I know who joins up! I don't want no part of them." Corbett's hands moved nervously on the table; he would not look at the organizer's face. Corbett continued, speaking with agitation:

"Listen, I been to one of your meetings. Me and them just don't get on. Jake Okenser, who used to work here, joined up; so did Jerry Adams. They're no-goods. Don't wanta work. Always complaining. They're not my sort and I don't want nothing to do with 'em."

"Harry, wouldn't you like to change things? Be able to buy the wife a new dress? Have more time with the kids?"

"Nope...not if it means joining with you guys. Count me out, Scheiker."

Corbett turned to his shears. Scheiker knew better than to talk to a man's back. He went over to a bulky, blond fellow who was pressing. Again he gave his name and the invitation to talk. The presser, whose name was Jonathan Hart, left his hissing iron and came to stand by the window with Scheiker. Together they stared out at the alley for a few minutes. Hart spoke first: "I know what you want, Scheiker. The word's been passed around since you came in. I ain't your man, though I'd like to be."

"Well, if your heart's with us, come on and join up. We can beat this thing, but we need men like you."

Hart ran his fingers through his hair, kicked a scrap of fabric, and looked directly at Scheiker.

"Scheiker...all right, Joe, I live in the dirtiest, rottenest tenement house you ever saw. And I been living there for eight years. My wife has to wash clothes in the bathtub...hang them out over the railway...they come in blacker than when they went out. Well, I got a chance to get out, see. There's a little place in Brooklyn. It's even got a back yard. Patch of ground; you know, for vegetables—big, fat, red tomatoes. The kids—I got three—they'll be able to run around, breathe something besides soot." He bit at his lower lip.

"Now I think the system's rotten. I know the workers are gettin' a raw deal. But I ain't gonna risk that little house. We had a feller here—Lieber was his name—who joined up. Got real active. One week he circ'lated a petition, tryin' to get a new john. Well he was laid off, real quick. Nope, I can't take the chance. You got any kids, Joe? You ain't? See, well that's a big difference. You can live dangerously. Listen, Joe, it's been nice talking, but I ain't your man...."

Schelker walked out along the alleyway. Even the sun's rays seemed to become soiled as they filtered down between the buildings. He was angry. When would they learn? Organizing was the answer – the only answer. Otherwise the sweatshops would endure forever.

Soon his spirits lifted. The day seemed fresher now that he had left the alley. Another shop to visit that afternoon.

Questions for Conversation

1. What grievances do you think the employees at Asterman's had?

2. What reasons did the men give Schelker for not joining the union? How could these objections have been overcome?

Persisting Questions of History

Judging Tactics of Organizing. Suppose that you are attempting to organize factory workers into a strong union. The workers at the factory are paid less than workers at other factories in the area. In addition, they have no benefits and must work at a very fast pace. Consider each one of the following tactics and decide (1) if it would work effectively, and (2) if it would be the fair or "right" thing to do:

- Distributing union pamphlets to workers at the factory.
- Enrolling individual workers secretly in the union until the majority of them belong.
- Staging an incident in which several workers fake back injuries, which they claim are caused by bending over their machines.
- Baiting a foreman or supervisor until he strikes you while workers are watching.
- Organizing a slowdown of workers at the time the company is working on a major order.
- Paying workers from union funds to report sick at a time when the company is working on a major order.
- Threatening to organize a boycott of the company's goods if the union is not recognized.
- Holding weekly meetings near the factory during the workers' lunch hours.

- Threatening to block future raises and benefits for those workers who do not support early organizing efforts.

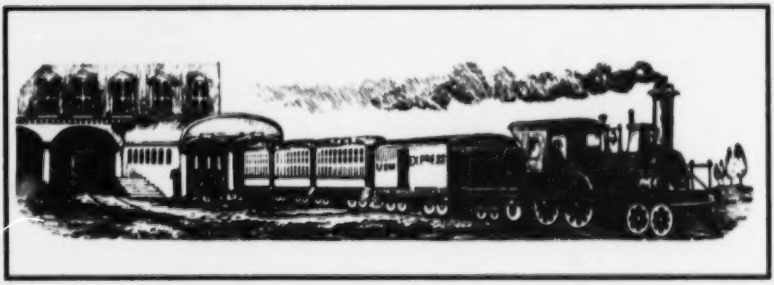
Evaluating Employer Policy. Which of the following tactics, once used by employers, do you think were legitimate ways to discourage organization of unions?

- Require as a condition of employment a written promise not to join a labor union.
- Enter into an agreement with other employers not to hire union members.
- Refuse to allow union organizers on company property.
- Guarantee higher wages than union workers get in other companies for the same work.
- Pay higher wages in the same factory to employees who do not join the union.
- Hire workers as informants to report any organizing.
- Seek passage of local laws limiting union activity.
- Establish an educational program on the "evils of unionism."
- Hire private policemen to prevent union activity.

Developing an Analogy. Some years ago, students in Montreal, Canada, announced plans for formation of a national union of high school students. Their goal was a student voice in the curriculum and administration of high schools. Suppose students at your school wanted to form a union with such aims as more individual attention from teachers, more independent study, or more student influence in course offerings. Do you think such a union would be possible at your school? Why? As students, what pressures could you exert toward fulfillment of your demands? What would be the major obstacles to the effectiveness of such an organization? What tactics could be used by school or community authorities to discourage the organization?

The Pullman Strike, 1894

In Chicago, railway workers confronted not only resistant employers but the troops and courts of the U.S. government. As you read about the Pullman strike, think about whether the government's actions in this case were proper.



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In 1880 the Pullman Company quietly bought a tract of 4,000 acres in the town of Hyde Park, which adjoined Chicago. It was to be the site of a dream fulfilled – the first model town in industrial America. It was to become a showplace, drawing admiring visitors from all over the world. And finally – in May 1894 – the dream exploded.

The vision of a model workers' community belonged to George M. Pullman, one of the great industrialists of the age. Since the 1860s, Pullman's name had been famous throughout the nation. Who had not heard of the luxurious railway sleeping cars produced by the Pullman Palace Car Company? Railroads everywhere clamored to obtain the cars for their lines. Shares in the company doubled in value.

George Pullman worried about the labor troubles that beset many other companies. If he gave workers a decent place to live, he reasoned, he would get a better class of workmen, labor turnover could be reduced, and unrest would turn into contentment. If he owned the entire town, he could insulate employees from corrupting influences.

Excerpted from Altgeld's America, by Ray Ginger (New York: Funk and Wagnalls). Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

Pullman thought the town could pay its way as well. He expected every dollar invested in it to yield a 6 percent return (though this was modest in an era when profits of 100 percent were common).

The first homes of Pullman were erected on 300 secluded acres. The little community was a beautiful place, especially when compared with Chicago, the filthy industrial giant just to its north. One-tenth of the area of Pullman was occupied by its parks. A lake was created for boating and swimming. An island in the lake was dotted with athletic fields.

Every street in town was paved with macadam. The sidewalks were paved too, usually with wood, and were lined with shade trees. The front lawn of every house in town was landscaped by the company. The buildings were nearly all yellow brick, made in Pullman itself of clay dredged from the bottom of Lake Calumet. By 1885, the town had 1,400 homes.

Schooling was free through the eighth grade, the only condition being that all students had to be vaccinated against smallpox. Another pioneering feature was the kindergarten for children between the ages of four and six. An evening school offered such commercial subjects as bookkeeping and stenography. A library was opened in 1883 with an initial gift of 5,000 volumes from George Pullman.

Pullman's Paradise grew year by year. It achieved its peak in 1893, just before the depression struck, when the population of the town was 12,600. At that time employment in the Pullman shops was 5,500, with many workers drawn from surrounding towns. The town grew in value too. The land had cost $800,000 in 1880. Twelve years later George Pullman proudly estimated its worth at $5 million.

But Pullman also had problems with the town. He thought that liquor was bad, so he banned it from the town. He kept his eye on everything. He had informers in every lodge, in every social group; sometimes it seemed that he had them in every parlor on Saturday night. He wanted to know everything that happened and to model his town on the traditional Puritan virtues of thrift and hard work and sobriety.

But many of his workers came from traditions other than Puritan. As early as 1884, more than half of the residents were foreign-born. Eight years later, 72 percent were foreign-born, including 23 percent Scandinavian, 12 percent British, the same proportion of Germans, 10 percent Dutch, 5 percent Irish. Many of them could see no harm in a pint of beer. Many of them wanted to worship in their own faiths.

George Pullman had his firm ideas about that too. There was one church building in town, and Pullman owned it. It was available to any religious group, but the rent set on it by Pullman was so high that no congregation in town could afford to pay it. The Presbyterians tried it for a few years and went bankrupt. The church then stayed vacant.

In 1893 the company could boast that its typical workers were "40 percent better in evidence of thrift and refinement and in all the outward indications of a wholesome way of life" than any comparable group in America. But one worker voiced the bitterness within the people: "We are born in a Pullman house, fed from the Pullman shop, taught in the Pullman school, and when we die we shall be buried in the Pullman cemetery and go to the Pullman hell."

As depression took hold in 1893, orders for Pullman's railroad cars dried up. George Pullman responded vigorously with a program of layoffs, reduced hours, wage cuts. In July 1893 the shops at Pullman employed 5,500 men; the following May only 3,300 remained at work. Wage rates were slashed an average of 25 percent. Yet stockholders' dividends were actually increased, and the company had an undistributed surplus of $2,320,000 for the year 1893-94.

For Pullman workers and their families, the winter of 1893-94 was a long, hard one. In some homes the children lacked the shoes and coats needed to go to school; in other homes children were kept in bed all day because there was no coal in the house.

Then came a voice of hope. The previous spring 50 railroad workers had met in Chicago to form the American Railway Union. Prior to that time, the only trade unions on the railroads had been the various brotherhoods, a separate one for each of the main occupations – engineers, brakemen, firemen – in railroading.

By 1893 some of the more radical officials in the brotherhoods were disgusted with quarreling and competition among their organizations. They decided to try to unite railroad employees in a single American Railway Union. Chief among these dissidents, and the first president of the ARU, was Eugene V. Debs, a secretary-treasurer of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen for the preceding 12 years.

Debs, 38 years old in 1893, was a man of awesome vigor. His life was one perpetual organizing trip. Debs was also a visionary who spoke eloquently of a coming era of peace and prosperity.

By 1894 the new union had 87 local lodges. The workers in the Pullman shops were eligible for membership in the ARU because the Pullman Company operated a few miles of railroad leading to its shops. Man by man, they joined.

After complaining without satisfaction to the vice-president of the company, a local committee of workers voted a strike. On May 11, 1894, more than 90 percent of the workers in the Pullman factory walked out. The company promptly laid off the others. Eugene Debs had advised against the strike. But after visiting the town, he realized that it had been an act of desperation.

The strike dragged along until June 12, when the first national convention of the American Railway Union met in Chicago. In one year the organization had enrolled 150,000 members. But knowing that the union was loosely organized and had little money, Debs was not sure it would win against the mighty Pullman Corporation. At the suggestion of Debs, the convention chose 12 men, including six strikers, to go to the company and propose arbitration of the wage dispute.

The company said that there was "nothing to arbitrate." Its position was that wages and working conditions should be determined by management, with no interference by labor. So the ARU convention voted a boycott, which Debs had tried to avoid. Switchmen in the ARU were ordered to refuse to switch any Pullman cars onto trains. If the switchmen were discharged or disciplined for this refusal, all ARU members of the railroad line were pledged to cease work at once.

The boycott began at noon, June 26, 1894. The railroads saw this as their chance to cut the ARU down to size. Unified by the General Managers Association, the 24 railroads running out of Chicago declared that their contracts with Pullman would be honored at all costs and that they would operate no trains without Pullman cars.

By June 29, 20 railroads were tied up. An estimated 125,000 men had quit work. Agents of the General Managers were hiring unemployed railroaders as strikebreakers. Leaders of the Railroad Brotherhoods were denouncing the ARU. Eugene Debs was sending telegrams all over the Great Plains advising his union members to use no violence and to stop no trains forcibly, but simply to refuse to handle Pullmans.

When the Illinois Central claimed that its property at Cairo, Illinois, was in danger, Governor John P. Altgeld sent three companies of the

What did this cartoonist think of the railroad strike and Eugene Debs?

state militia there. A crowd stopped a train at Hammond, Indiana, and forced the crew to detach two Pullmans. Two other trains were temporarily stopped by mobs in Chicago. But there were no major riots. No mail had accumulated in Chicago.

Yet the federal district attorney in Chicago wired Washington on June 29 that conditions there were so bad that special deputies were needed. At the urging of the General Managers, Richard B. Olney, attorney general of the United States, appointed Edwin Walker as special federal attorney to handle the strike situation. Walker was an attorney for a railroad that belonged to the General Managers Association.

Olney also sent Walker some pointed advice: The best way to cope with conditions was "by a force which is overwhelming and prevents any attempt at resistance." Olney believed that a national railroad strike was illegal because, in his judgment, the strikers were impeding interstate commerce and the movement of the U.S. mails.

On July 2 in Chicago, Edwin Walker and the federal district attorney drafted an application for a court order against the strike leaders. They based this action on the Sherman Antitrust Act. The law declared illegal "every contract, combination in the form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy, in restraint of trade or commerce among the several states, or with foreign nations." Now Olney used the law as a weapon against "combination" and "conspiracy" by the people of organized labor.

Federal judges granted the injunction immediately. The range of the court's order was vast: The strike leaders were enjoined from any deed to encourage the boycott; they could not send telegrams about it, or talk about it, or write about it.

If the ARU leaders obeyed the injunction, the boycott would collapse; central coordination was essential. But if they did not obey it, all strikers would be in active opposition to the federal government, and the leaders might well go to jail for contempt of court. Debs and his colleagues decided to ignore the court order.

Olney hit a snag when he proposed sending federal troops to Chicago to insure that the mail would get through and trade would continue. The secretary of war and the Army chief of staff both opposed the move. But on July 3 Olney received a telegram saying that no agency but the U.S. Army could protect the mails. The telegram was signed by Judge Peter Grosscup – one of the judges who had granted the injunction – Edwin Walker, and the federal district attorney in Chicago. President Grover Cleveland ordered the entire command from Fort Sheridan turned out for active duty in Chicago on July 4.

The ARU was furious. So was Governor Altgeld. He protested to the president that neither he nor the state legislature had asked for help. Local and state authority was adequate to cope with what little violence had occurred, he said.

The president's reply was brisk. He wired back that the postal authorities had asked for the removal of obstructions to the mails, that Judge Grosscup had asked for help in enforcing the injunction, and that there was "competent proof that conspiracies existed against commerce between the states." Any of these conditions, President Cleveland contended, was ample to give him power to order federal troops into Illinois.

Governor Altgeld reasserted his position forcibly and at length. The president closed the discussion curtly. The federal troops took over – and along with them, 5,000 special federal deputy marshals. Of this latter group, two-thirds were chosen by the railroads and were responsible to them (although the marshal's office gave them badges).

The result was chaos. On July 5, the day after the Army reached Chicago, violence was more serious than before. The next day it reached its peak when incendiaries ignited railroad cars. Fanned by breezes, the flames swept through row upon row of cars tightly packed

in the outlying yards, which fire hoses often could not reach. In the evening a mob of about 6,000 people pillaged the Panhandle yards in South Chicago, destroying 700 cars. Total damage in that one day was $340,000, although on no other day was it more than $4,000.

On July 7 another crowd of several thousand gathered on Loomis Street, where federal troops were guarding a train being moved by anti-union men. As the onlookers showered the guards with abuse and stones, ignoring the troop commander's warning to disperse, the troops loaded their rifles. This gesture only incited more showers of stones.

Immediately the commander ordered a bayonet charge; several persons fell to the ground bleeding heavily. Then the mob regrouped and tipped over a flatcar. With four soldiers badly wounded and no reinforcements in sight, the commander ordered his men to fire at will. They continued shooting until the mob had fled; 20 people were wounded and four killed.

Eugene Debs, continuing his efforts to prevent violence, again told the strikers: "Our men have the right to quit, but their right ends there. Other men have the right to take their places, whatever the opinion of the propriety of so doing may be. Keep away from railroad yards, or rights-of-way, or other places where large crowds congregate. A safe plan is to remain away entirely from places where there is any likelihood of an outbreak."

Debs repeatedly argued that the rioting was being done by hooligans, not by strikers. During the entire boycott, not a single ARU member in Chicago was killed or wounded by law-enforcement authorities.

On July 10, with the boycott obviously on its last legs, a federal grand jury in Chicago delivered another serious blow by indicting Debs and three colleagues for conspiracy to obstruct a mail train.

The mayors of Chicago and Detroit made a futile call on the vice-president of the Pullman Company to again request arbitration. They found him unyielding. "The issue at question, which was simply that of reopening the shops at Pullman and carrying them on at a ruinous loss, was not a proper subject for arbitration," he was reported to have said.

The boycott dragged along another week, while at Pullman the leader of the original strikers announced that they were being starved

into submission. Then, on July 17, Debs and his associates were again arrested, this time for violating the July 2 injunction. They refused to post bail and were imprisoned. A day later a notice was put up on the gates of the Pullman shops: "These gates will be opened as soon as the number of operatives is sufficient to make a working force in all departments." It was the end of the Pullman Strike.

Of the men now hired at Pullman, one of every four had not worked there before the strike. Every applicant was forced to sign a pledge that he would not join any union. A thousand former employees were left destitute. Governor Altgeld appealed to the Pullman Company to help them. He got no reply. Altgeld then called upon the public for relief.

Tried for contempt of court, Debs was found guilty on December 14, 1894, and sentenced to six months in jail. The U.S. Supreme Court, which heard the case on a petition of habeas corpus, upheld the conviction on May 27, 1895. The Supreme Court, ignoring the Sherman Act on which the injunction had been based, reached its unanimous opinion by stressing the power of the federal courts to prevent interference with the mails and interstate commerce.

Debs spent much of his time in jail reading and thinking. He emerged after six months as a convert to socialism. Over a long and active career that followed, Debs was a candidate for president five times on the Socialist Party ticket.

Persisting Questions of History

Reviewing Decisions. Was it right for the federal government to send troops into the Pullman strike and to arrest leaders of the union? Was the government protecting the public interest? Justify your opinion.

Examining the Central Issues of This Unit. You have read about working conditions in the 1800s and about the formation of early unions. You have discussed many issues raised in the readings. For the first two central issues of this unit (see page 4), write a brief summary of how the readings and discussion so far have contributed to your thinking on these questions.

Overview: 1900-1940

The effort to build unions continued, although their membership represented a small percentage of the labor force. Momentum was maintained by the organized determination of the AFL and growing public suspicion of big business.

The Sherman Antitrust Act, passed by Congress in 1890, embodied that suspicion, permitting regulation of the great trusts and monopolies that controlled dozens of major commodities, from oil to sugar to beef. Yet the Sherman Act was in fact used against labor unions as much as it was directed at business combinations and monopolies. Striking unions found themselves judged responsible for "restraint of trade or commerce" in several major court cases. Still, some progress was made in the early years of the 20th century.

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When the antimonopoly terms of the Sherman Act were toughened by the Clayton Antitrust Act in 1914, labor unions were specifically excluded from its terms: "...the labor of a human being is not a commodity or article of commerce." The laws also said that strikes, peaceful picketing, and boycotts were legal tactics for unions in any case within federal control.

Efforts were also made to open new channels toward labor-management peace through the use of impartial referees to help settle disputes. This could be done in two major ways:

- Mediation, in which the third party simply tried to organize meetings of labor and management, and suggested terms on which they might agree.
- Arbitration, in which labor and management agreed in advance to accept a full set of terms proposed by a third party.

A series of laws from 1888 through 1934 established such procedures for the vital interstate railroads. In 1902 President Theodore Roosevelt himself intervened in a strike called by the United Mine Workers and persuaded mine owners to approve the wage increase proposed by a special arbitration commission. During World War I, federal mediation and arbitration efforts were applied to defense industries.

Labor peace, however, still seemed only a hope after 1920. The Clayton Act had appeared to be a great labor victory – Samuel Gompers called it the "Magna Carta of labor." But federal courts were slow to interpret the act in ways favorable to the unions, and judges continued to issue federal injunction – stop orders – against strikers.

The image of labor radicalism remained strong as Communists began to participate in industrial unions. Many unions were torn by bitter fights for control between Communist and anti-Communist leaders. Bloody violence in the textile mills of North Carolina and the coal fields of West Virginia and Illinois tarnished the image of organized labor.

All these events strengthened employers' associations in their opposition to unionism. Many industries built up company unions, outside the regular labor movement and controlled by company management. Other employers freely offered special benefits – vacations with pay, profit-sharing and pension plans, medical services – as incentives against membership in unions.

Worst of all for the union cause was the great national economic depression that began in 1929. It was the blow that helped cut total union membership by nearly half at the end of the 1920s.

Labor's new strength arose out of the midst of this economic grief, however. With millions out of work, Congress enacted laws calling for massive social change – President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal." A major landmark of this change was the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, which said in effect that employers had to recognize union organizing efforts and bargain with workers' union representatives.

The act was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in May 1935, but its labor sections reappeared virtually unchanged two months later with the passage of the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act).

The new law upheld the rights of workers to join independent unions and to carry on collective bargaining through their union representatives. A National Labor Relations Board was established to supervise the election of union bargaining agents by workers.

The Wagner Act also prohibited any "interference, restraint, or coercion" by employers trying to prevent union organizing. "Unfair labor practices" by employers – ranging from the blacklist and the use of force to the circulation of anti-union propaganda – were defined in the Wagner

Act. The NLRB was given authority to hold public hearings on complaints about such practices and to order employers to stop.

Union membership boomed under the law. Membership was even stimulated by a great rift in the American Federation of Labor. One faction of AFL leaders formed a committee to enroll the unskilled industrial workers, who had been shunned by the Federation for half a century. The committee leaders were expelled from the AFL in 1938. They then formed the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) under the presidency of John L. Lewis. The new competition helped swell overall union membership, which increased from 4,400,000 in 1935 to more than 13 million – almost a quarter of the total working force – by 1943.

Questions for Conversation

1. The Magna Carta was a document written in the year 1215. It, for the first time, limited the power of the English king. What do you think Samuel Gompers meant when he called the Clayton Act the Magna Carta of labor? Do you think this was a good description?

2. Do you think either mediation or arbitration could have solved the Pullman Strike? Why do you think Pullman management declined to participate in mediation or arbitration?

The Battle at the Overpass, 1937

Despite such advances as the Clayton Act and the Wagner Act, the union successes of the 1930s did not come easily. Some of the most violent confrontations occurred at this time, as new industrial unions fought for recognition. Led by the CIO, many of these strikes were extremely bitter. One of the most famous incidents took place in 1937. Known as the "Battle of the Overpass," this clash involved the United Automobile Workers and the Ford Motor Company.

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Close to 60,000 people were gathered in Cadillac Square, the heart of Detroit and automobile manufacturing, in the late afternoon of April 5, 1937. The crowd quieted as Homer Martin, the president of the United Automobile Workers, began to speak: "...The working condition of the automobile workers of this city is a national scandal....Henry Ford, you can't stop your workers from joining the union...."

Such talk represented a drastic turnabout. For years, ever since it instituted the $5 day in 1914, the Ford Motor Company had enjoyed a worldwide reputation as a "workers' paradise." Ford plants were always spotlessly clean; rubbish cans were emptied every two hours and the floors were scrubbed regularly. Color patterns were designed to ease eyestrain and make the work environment pleasant. A variety of bells, locks, and signs alerted workers to danger. Sanitation measures, goggles, respirators, and elaborate medical facilities were evidence that Henry Ford cared about the health of his workers.

But these conditions were also designed to maximize efficiency and production. If men were late or lagged in their work, the complex assembly line would break down and the factory would stop. Thus, supervisors enforced work schedules rigorously. Men with years of experience were dismissed for stopping work a few seconds before the quitting bell. Company rules also forbade talking, whistling, or singing on the job.

Talk of workers joining unions was a sore point with Henry Ford. Asked in an interview if he believed in labor unions, he replied: "No, I don't. Labor unions mean war, and I don't believe in war." In 1933 Ford wrote: "I have never bargained with my men, I have always bargained for them....I think we have made better bargains for them than any stranger could, or than they could make for themselves."

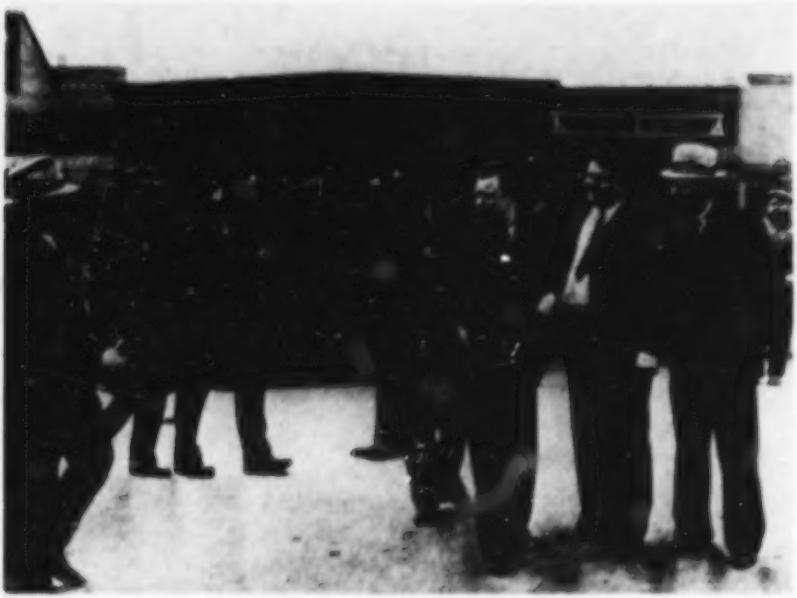
But workers evidently believed otherwise. In the 1930s they joined unions in large numbers. However well organized or influential a union became, Henry Ford refused to deal with it. Such an uncompromising attitude toward the United Automobile Workers provided the fuel for the mass meeting in Cadillac Square in 1937.

Shortly after that rally, the UAW created a special "Ford Organizing Committee" to direct its unionization drive against the last remaining opponent among the "Big Three" automobile companies. Henry Ford countered by distributing to 150,000 employees copies of the founder's views concerning unionism. Such views, known as "Fordisms," stated that:

- A monopoly of jobs in this country is just as bad as a monopoly of bread.
- Our men ought to consider whether it is necessary to pay some outsider for the privilege of working at Ford's.
- Figure it out for yourself. If you go into a union, they have got you and what have you got?

In May 1937 the UAW focused its efforts on Dearborn, Michigan, the site of the giant River Rouge plant built by Ford after World War I. The biggest factory in the world in the 1920s, this plant covered an area a mile and a half long and three-quarters of a mile wide. It was the center of the Ford Company's operations and employed more than 80,000 people. The Dearborn city council proceeded to pass an ordinance forbidding unionists to harangue Rouge workers at the plant gates or anywhere in Dearborn. The union got around the ordinance by hiring a monoplane which circled the Rouge plant and from a loudspeaker urged the employees: "Cast aside your fears." By the end of May, the UAW was publicly demanding unionization, a six-hour day, and an $8 minimum daily wage for River Rouge workers.

In a somber gray building just outside the Dearborn city limits, Richard Frankensteen, the union's best organizer in the Detroit district, and Walter Reuther, his second in command, awaited permission to distribute leaflets to Ford workers as they left company property at the Rouge. Eight months of secret meetings had preceded this moment, and the UAW was prepared to act. Reuther told reporters that the union organizing committee was relying on 600 "key" Ford workers who already were union members. Frankensteen said that the UAW hoped to get formal recognition from Ford without a strike.



Moments before the Battle at the Overpass.
Frankensteen is second from right, Reuther third from right.

The distribution of leaflets was set for the afternoon of May 26 when the 2 p.m. shift changed at the Rouge. The event was well publicized. At noon people were beginning to gather outside the plant. In the crowd were members of the press, photographers, clergymen, and investigators from the U.S. Senate Civil Liberties Subcommittee, as well as union sympathizers.

At the appointed time Frankensteen, Reuther, and other members of the UAW Ford Organizing Committee approached the overpass that would take them onto Ford Company property. As Frankensteen and his lieutenants climbed the flight of stairs to the overpass, they were followed by a band of newsmen, photographers, and other invited guests.

From the other side appeared a group of Ford men. Someone shouted, "You're on Ford property. Get the hell off here!" As Frankensteen turned to go, someone clipped him on the neck. Frankensteen, a well-built ex-football player, wheeled and returned the blow. Four or five men surrounded him, knocked him down, and pulled his coat over his head, kicking him in the stomach and groin.

Meanwhile, Reuther was running toward the steps, doubled up for protection. He was pitched down the stairs headlong, but broke his fall by grabbing a handrail. The other members of the Frankensteen-Reuther group had cleared the steps leading from the overpass. Frankensteen's assailants followed and hurled him down the steps, landing by landing. Cameramen scampered away to protect their photographic plates, which held the evidence of the encounter.

Below, other workers pushed back union people. Women of the union party, distinguished by green berets and armbands of the UAW "emergency brigade," were forced back into automobiles and streetcars. Seven women were injured, according to the union; some were kicked, others stepped on and beaten. The outbreak occured at 2 p.m.; by 2:15 the battle was over.

That evening, Harry Bennett, head of the company's police force, issued a statement saying that the battle was provoked by union officials and that no Ford police were involved in the fight.

In June, the National Labor Relations Board took action against Ford, saying the company had assaulted UAW leaders and interfered with independent organization of Ford workers. The hearing on the NLRB complaint lasted through most of the hot summer. At the end, the board found the Ford company guilty of unfair practices and ordered the company to "cease and desist" from all anti-union activities.

Ford had his lawyers resort to delaying tactics that warded off final judgment for three and a half years. During these years, the UAW continued to hand out leaflets to Ford personnel. Sit-down strikes and a few walkouts plagued Ford's regional assembly plants.

Finally on February 10, 1941, the Supreme Court upheld the findings of the NLRB. Eight days later, notices were put up in all Ford factories announcing that workers could organize as they wished. Bennett tried to defeat the UAW by calling in AFL organizers in the hope of starting an inter-union scramble. Most employees, at last freed from coercion, preferred the union of their fellow auto workers.

On April 2, Bennett discharged the eight workers on the grievance committee of Local 600 and broke off all relations with the union. The UAW leaders retaliated by striking the Ford plants. Nearly all of the tens of thousands of workers eagerly responded to the call. They resorted to mass picketing and the barricade. Men by the hundreds came in their

Ford cars toward the huge plant and remained bumper-to-bumper near the main entrances, thus intimidating the greatly outnumbered guards. By this means the factories were shut tight.

The governor of Michigan, anxious to prevent violence, succeeded in persuading Ford to keep his plant closed and the union to stop barricading the entrances. He also arranged a truce to permit an election under government supervision. The result of the vote favored the UAW by a majority of 70 percent.

After many years of bitter opposition to unionism, Henry Ford, in the words of his son Edsel, "decided to go the whole way....No half-measures will be effective." Again Bennett acted for his crotchety but now compliant master. Although he had a few days before declared that the union representatives "can bargain till hell freezes over but they won't get anything," he now invited them to lunch and informed them that Ford was ready to give the best terms in the industry. The final contract was indeed, according to the union's own estimate, "a model for the industry." It granted wage increases up to 30 cents an hour in order to make Ford wage rates higher than those of other firms; the abolition of the hated and feared Service Department; a shop steward system of one for every 550 workers; time and a half for overtime and double pay for Sundays and holidays; two hours' pay for workers called to work and then sent home; seniority rights; the reinstatement of workers previously discharged for union membership; the union shop and the check-off—payroll collection of union dues by the company. On their part, the union leaders pledged to enforce labor peace, to drop all labor cases against the company, and to permit the use of the union label on Ford cars.

Persisting Questions of History

Reviewing Decisions. Was it right for federal courts to force Henry Ford to bargain collectively with his workers? Why or why not? Compare your attitude in this case with your attitude toward government intervention in the Pullman strike.

Weighing Arguments. The Wagner Act compelled the employer to bargain with employees and prohibited it from dismissing workers engaged in organizing a union. Ford and other employers argued that such laws take away the freedom of the employer to deal with each worker on an individual basis. Should an employer have the right to dismiss a worker who tries to organize a union? Explain your opinion.

Deciding Policy. Some unions became strong enough after 1935 to force employers to hire union members only. Should unions be allowed to control this decision? Would you favor a state law that guaranteed workers the right to refuse to join the union? Justify your opinion.

Evaluating Proposals. Employers such as Pullman and Ford opposed collective bargaining because they feared that unions might force the company to give workers everything they wanted. Below is a list of possible union demands. Under what conditions, if any, would you consider each demand to be reasonable? What is the reasoning behind your judgment?

- No worker may be dismissed without approval of an elected union committee.
- All workers are to receive an annual wage increase of 3 percent.
- The company will provide clean restrooms, showers, lockers, a lunchroom, and drink machines.
- All workers will receive, in addition to their wages, annual dividends out of the profits of the company.
- The company may not hire a person who refuses to join the union.
- Union members will have a regular voting representative on the company's board of directors.
- The company will pay for union members' health and life insurance, and a guaranteed pension after retirement.
- Workers absent because of illness will receive full pay.
- The official workweek will be limited to 35 hours, with time and a half for overtime.
- Workers are not to be hired without approval by a union committee.
- A union representative will approve all work assignments and production quotas.
- Automatic raises will be geared to the rise in the cost of living.
- Any worker whose job is to be eliminated by automatic machinery will be trained for new work.

Overview: 1940-Present

Examining several topics can help put current labor issues in perspective. These topics include the stagnation of labor union membership, increasingly stringent regulation of unions by the federal government, the participation of unions in politics, and the changing nature of the economy and work.

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Growth and Decline of Labor Union Membership

As Table 1 shows, labor union membership grew very sporadically between 1900 and 1932. Between 1930 and 1945, union membership increased enormously—from nearly 3.6 million to nearly 15 million (or 35 percent of the non-agricultural work force). Between the end of the war and 1978, organized labor experienced further, but slower, growth. Union membership dropped after 1978, however, losing almost a half million members by 1980. In fact, the proportion of union members to the total workforce has steadily declined since 1945.

The Encouragement of Unions by Government

Success in recruiting new members was not solely the result of union activity. In fact, most of labor's growth would have been impossible without the intervention of the federal government in the 1930s.

Similarly, the enormous growth of unions during World War II was made possible by the huge expansion of the wartime economy and favorable federal labor policy. In exchange for pledges from unions not to strike, the federal government forced many large industrial employers to require all newly-hired workers to become union members. This policy increased unions' members and their financial resources.

During the war, union organizing surges occurred in the large industries, which were awarded the greatest share of government war contracts. Such corporations as Ford and General Motors had long experience in mass production of industrial goods and were capable of quickly retooling from automobiles to tanks, airplanes, and other war goods. Although these industries had long resisted unionization, the need for labor and guaranteed profits led them to accept, if grudgingly, federal interference in their labor relations.

Table 1
Union Membership Among Workers

	Union Members (in 1,000s)	Non-agricultural Work Force (in 1000s)	Percent of Work Force (in unions)
1900	791	15,178	5.2
1905	1,918	18,707	10.3
1910	2,116	21,697	9.8
1915	2,560	23,149	11.1
1920	5,034	27,434	18.3
1925	3,566	29,751	12.0
1930	3,632	29,424	11.6
1935	3,728	27,053	13.2
1940	8,944	32,376	26.9
1945	14,796	40,394	35.5
1950	15,000*	45,222	31.5
1955	17,749	50,675	33.2
1960	18,117	54,234	31.4
1965	18,519	60,815	28.4
1970	20,752	70,644	27.4
1978	20,200	90,583*	22.3
1980	19,700*	94,258*	20.9
1983	22,422	111,550*	20.1
1984	20,892	113,544*	18.4

* = estimates

Sources: Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970 (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1975) and World Almanac (New York: World Almanac, 1987).

Although most unions pledged not to strike during the war, grievances – including wages, work rules, seniority, working conditions – piled up, unresolved. While not large in number and usually short, some strikes did occur. In general, however, labor unions were faithful to their no-strike pledges, and public opinion generally praised unions for their restraint and patriotism. By the end of the war, however, labor's rank and file were ready to erupt.

Today's Issues

In the six months after September 1, 1945, more workers went on strike for longer periods of time then ever before or since. For employers and unionists alike, the war had raised but not resolved basic issues. Employers believed that labor's wartime gains threatened to undermine business and to wrest control of business decision-making away from managers. Politically, they planned to build on anti-union legislation enacted during the war (e.g., the Smith-Connolly Act regarding coal miners) to curb unions' political and economic ambitions.

Union leaders, on the other hand, feared that wartime membership gains and favorable industrial contracts could be wiped out overnight. Labor leaders remembered only too well the situation after World War I, when employers used growing postwar unemployment – which most expected again – to crush the labor unions. In addition, labor leaders faced increasingly angry workers inside their unions.

Unions and Politics

In the immediate post-war period, many unions proved successful in strike actions. Unions got wage increases for their rank and file, and collective bargaining was eventually accepted by most employers. On the other hand, employers resisted many union initiatives while reasserting management control over the production process and discipline within the workplace. What was more, employers thought they had begun to roll back the power of unions in industrial decision-making.

In 1947, Congress responded to anti-union pressures by enacting the Labor-Management Relations (Taft-Hartley) Act. The Act limited the right of workers to strike; required union votes on employer labor contracts and an 80-day "cooling off" period between such votes and actual walkouts; forced union leaders to sign anti-Communist affidavits; allowed states to pass "right-to-work" laws, which prohibited union shops; and reduced the pro-union advocacy of the NLRB.

Conservatives strongly supported this measure. They had long thought that workers actually identified with their employers rather than unions, recognized the wastefulness of strikes, and would not strike unless forced to by union leaders. The Taft-Hartley Act was consequently supported by conservatives as a way to protect workers as well as to protect employers and the public from alleged union wrong-doing.

Unionists, on the other hand, were adamantly opposed to Taft-Hartley. They saw the elections of 1948 as an opportunity to reward labor supporters, to punish those who supported Taft-Hartley, and to

keep a friendly (Democratic party) administration in the White House. The AFL created a new political action arm, while the CIO continued the activities of its Political Action Committee (PAC), created in 1943. Since federal law prohibited the donation of union dues to any political candidate, labor unions resorted to drives for voluntary political contributions from their members. Door-to-door visits, leaflet and pamphlet distribution, and other activities were used to mobilize voters.

In the two decades after 1950, unions made important gains in collective bargaining and in organizing new categories of workers. The merger of the AFL and the CIO in 1955 was also an important breakthrough, ending years of conflict and developing a more unified political voice for labor.

At the same time, organized labor's many critics spoke out on a variety of issues. Enduring corruption in such unions as the Longshoremen and the Teamsters led to close public scrutiny of union leaders and practices. Such corruption led to the Landrum-Griffin Act (1959), which required unions to publicly account for their funds, to make financial reports to the Secretary of Labor, to hold democratic elections, and to further restrict certain organizing practices. As the image of the "labor racketeer" became fixed in the public's mind, labor union prestige and political power declined.

Labor was challenged in at least two other ways as well. First, concern about labor's political power created a backlash. The Conservative National Right-to-Work Committee, for example, blasted organized labor and used its influence to encourage checks on union power through state right-to-work laws, which outlawed union shops. Such laws were passed in Sunbelt states from Virginia to Arizona, a region that experienced substantial increases in industrial jobs after World War II.

Second, some union leaders were also distrusted because of their involvement in the 1930s in radical – often Communist Party – politics. Most union officials repudiated their radical pasts. Indeed, labor leaders came to see how closely labor union welfare had become bound to the welfare of military industries, which employed the largest numbers of union members. Through the 1950s, sharp cuts in defense/military expenditures caused sharp recessions. Little wonder, then, that labor leaders generally became ardent supporters of the "cold war" with the Soviet Union and the semi-permanent wartime economy.

The Changing Nature of the Economy and Work

The stupendous growth of the U.S. economy was the most astonishing development of the postwar years. Gross national product (GNP) grew by 250 percent between 1945 and 1960. By 1960, per capita income was 35 percent higher than in the boom year 1945. Short-term credit expanded nearly five-fold in the same period, as Americans borrowed ever-greater sums to buy such desired consumer goods as automobiles, washing machines, and television sets.

Yet not all Americans shared in the accumulating affluence. In *The Other America* (1962), Michael Harrington wrote that "tens of millions of Americans are...maimed in body and spirit, existing at levels beneath those necessary for human decency." By 1970, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that over 60 percent of Americans lived at or below an "intermediate" standard of living, which it defined as a $10,700 income for a family of four.

Women took paid work in ever-increasing numbers. As Table 2 suggests, only 20 percent of all women were employed for pay outside the home in 1900. By 1985, 54.5 percent of all women were so employed. The trends applied to married women as well.

Work itself changed as the economy evolved from one primarily devoted to the production of goods to one providing services. The total number of workers in manufacturing remained stable through 1970, but workers engaged in farming, mining, and other extractive industries dropped from 25 percent of the labor force in 1940 to about 5 percent in 1970. At the same time, workers in service, clerical, and government employment – many of them "white collar" workers – greatly increased, becoming over 50 percent of the total work force by 1950.

Although Americans have usually associated white collar work with higher status and better compensation than blue collar work, the largest growth in white collar occupations in the postwar period was in sales and clerical work. Many typists, secretaries, grocery clerks, and cafeteria cashiers, among others, engaged in jobs that were less creative, allowed less independence, and provided workers with less satisfaction than many blue collar jobs. In addition, such jobs tended to require little skill and were consequently low-paying, characteristics that were both cause and consequence of the increasing percentage of women in the service labor force. Women came to hold over 70 percent of sales and clerical jobs.

Table 2
Women in the Work Force
(all figures stated in percentages)

	% of Women in Paid Work	Women as % Paid Workers	% of Married Women in Paid Work
1890	18.9	17.0	4.6
1900	20.6	18.1	5.6
1910	25.4	20.0	10.7
1920	23.7	20.4	9.0
1930	24.8	21.9	11.7
1940	25.8	24.6	15.6
1950	29.0	27.8	23.0
1960	34.5	32.1	31.7
1970	41.6	37.2	40.2
1980	51.5*	42.9*	50.2*
1985	54.5*	44.5*	54.2*

* not strictly comparable

Source: Women in the American Economy, by Cynthia M. Taeuber and Victor Valdisera (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, 1986).

Yet manual labor hardly disappeared. Although the proportion of laborers engaged in manufacturing declined after World War II, the actual number of workers engaged in manual labor increased. Changing technologies transformed factory work and greatly increased worker productivity. While it took 310 hours to produce one automobile in 1945, it took less than half that in 1960 and even less by 1980. Throughout the postwar period, corporations invested huge sums in labor-saving machinery to quicken the pace of production. By the mid-1970s, robotics became the newest example of increasing mechanization of the workplace. But what was seen as necessary for business was often seen as threatening to laborers, for automation obviously meant loss of jobs, at least in the short run.

The global nature of the modern economy has also had an impact on unions. As labor unions negotiated better and better wage and

benefits packages, corporations' labor expenses increased rapidly. Foreign goods became attractive options for American consumers because of their lower prices and increasing quality. To cut expenses and compete with foreign manufacturers, many corporations relocated factories, along with jobs. Some have moved to other countries, particularly in the Third World, while others have moved to parts of the United States where unions are less well established than they are in the industrial northeast and Great Lakes regions.

Many of the changes of the postwar society and economy reduced the strength of unionized labor. As the work force changed after World War II, the unionized portion of the non-agricultural work force decreased. Organizing workers in growing white collar occupations proved difficult. Yet the labor movement did surge forward in one of these sectors. In 1955, only 400,000 government employees belonged to unions. By the early 1970s, over 4 million public employees belonged to unions.

Behind these surges of public employee unionism lay significant changes in government employment. From the end of the war to 1970, public employees grew from roughly 5.5 million workers to nearly 12 million. Nearly 85 percent of the increase occurred at the state and local levels of government. The changing nature of work also made unions more appealing to public employees. Local governments, often hard-pressed by taxpayer revolts and ever-increasing demands for more and better government services, required higher and higher productivity standards while trying to hold the line on employee wage increases.

Questions for Conversation

1. Why do you think that the number of women in the workforce has increased so dramatically in recent decades? Consider both economic and social reasons.

2. *Business Week* observed in the 1950s that "Automation [means] the art and science of going through as many stages of production as possible with as little human help as possible." Do you agree with this definition? What are the implications for workers?

3. How might workers maintain an adequate standard of living while U.S. companies control expenses so they can compete with foreign manufacturers? Do you think this conflict can be solved? Why or why not?

Challenge to the Government

In the 1960s and 1970s, unions of public employees—people who worked for local, state, or national government—were the fastest growing labor organizations. Strikes by public workers, especially those charged with protecting public safety, raised serious questions about the rights of workers. Should such workers have the right to strike? If they did, who would protect the public? Without that right, how could workers force governments to address issues of working conditions?

In 1981, members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO), employees of the U.S. government, went on strike. They were asking for better wages, shorter working hours, and better working conditions. They believed that the air transportation system would grind to a halt without them. They were wrong. Ultimately, the striking workers were fired, and their union was decertified—stripped of its right to bargain with the government. As you read the story, think about how the rights of the workers, the employers, and the public might have been balanced in this case.

* * * * *

It was the sharpest challenge in years to the authority of the government—a strike by a tiny but crucial union in defiance of the president, the courts, and the laws of the land.

The challenge: 13,000 air-traffic controllers—skilled traffic cops of the nation's air lanes—who scorned presidential ultimatums by staging the first national strike ever called by a union against the federal government.

Reagan's response: The unleashing of an awesome counterattack of court orders, arrests, mass firings, and fines, with threats of more to come.

The battle of wills placed Reagan, seven months into his term of office, in direct and seemingly irreconcilable conflict with a group of men and women whose responsibilities to the public are almost unequaled in government service. At stake was nothing less than the government's

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Excerpted from U.S. News and World Report 91 (August 17, 1981), pp. 17-20. Used by permission.

ability to make its own employees obey U.S. laws, with implications for public-worker unions at all levels of government. For the president, there was also his own prestige on the line.

"Our position is irreversible," said the president as he warned the strikers to return to work or lose their jobs.

"We will not go back to work," replied an equally resolute Robert Poli, the militant head of PATCO.

Caught in the middle of this yes-you-will, no-I-won't drama were the airlines, the flying public, and the array of businesses that cater to both.

Absent: Chaos. Predicted pandemonium at airports – and in traffic-control towers – largely failed to materialize in the first week of the strike. By the tens of thousands, would-be air travelers stayed home or made other travel arrangements. Roughly three-fourths of 14,200 regular commercial flights were in the air within a couple of days, without mishap.

Long-range implications were more ominous. If the firings stuck, months or years could pass before air traffic returned to normal. Most airlines were still losing money from the effects of the business slump and were ill-equipped to long withstand additional economic agony....

Each of the controllers – like all federal civilian employees – signed an oath when hired which read: "I am not participating in any strike against the Government of the United States or any agency thereof, and I will not so participate while an employee of the Government of the United States or any agency thereof."

Beyond that, Congress in 1955 made strikes against the federal government a crime punishable by a $1,000 fine and a year's imprisonment. In 1947, it allowed the government to fire strikers and refuse to re-employ them. The Supreme Court upheld these laws in 1971. Yet at least 22 times since the Court ruled, groups of federal workers have defied both the law and their oaths – mostly with impunity. Not once has a striker been convicted. In most instances when firings occurred, the workers were later rehired....

Tough Testing. The people who staff the air-traffic centers and towers are, by all accounts, an unusual assortment of government workers. Mostly high school graduates, they passed stiff examinations to get their jobs and endured years of training. But complaints abound

about the demands of their work – odd hours, tension, demanding responsibilities. Perhaps because of their isolated work lives, controllers have little to do with other federal employees or other public-employee unions....They came to compare themselves, said many observers, with the pilots whose planes they guided – and many wanted the same $100,000-a-year salaries.

Years of acrimonious relations with the Federal Aviation Administration forged the controllers into what one close observer calls a "fanatical" group. Its anger burst forth this summer.

On June 22, three hours before an earlier strike deadline, PATCO negotiated a tentative contract with the government which called for an average of $2,300 a year per member in added wages or benefits. In addition, the air traffic controllers would receive the same raises expected to be granted this fall to all federal employees – another $1,632 for the typical controller. They presently earn an average of $34,000 a year, although pay reaches as much as $49,229 for top jobs at the nation's busiest traffic-control centers.

Negotiator Poli said he took the June agreement to his members for ratification only because the necessary 80 percent had not voted beforehand to authorize a strike. At his urging, 95.3 percent of the controllers voted against the proposed contract and for a walkout.

Two days of talks with Transportation Secretary Drew Lewis and FAA Administrator Lynn Helms got nowhere. PATCO's demands would have cost the government $34,000 a year per controller, Lewis contended. To Poli, more money and a shorter, 32-hour workweek seemed justified for his members: "They work under such stress that many of them develop physical and mental problems, including social withdrawal, marital trouble, or concealed alcoholism."...

Thus the showdown began. Would Reagan stick by his pledge – to fire controllers if they struck – and refuse to negotiate further? Could the government keep planes in the air – and safely out of each other's way – without the vast majority of its air controllers at their posts? Could PATCO holds its ranks firm in the face of enormous pressure?

The union answered that last question quickly. Of its 15,000 members, roughly 13,000 joined the strike when it began at 7 a.m. on August 3. Left behind to do their work were 7,000 or so controllers – nonunion workers, members who stayed on the job, and supervisors. Days later,

after thousands of dismissal notices had gone out, only 1,200 or so strikers had abandoned the picket lines and returned to work.

Reagan's actions reflected just as much resolve. He turned loose the government's full resources against the union on three broad fronts –

- Strikers were given 48 hours to get back to work. When those 48 hours – later lengthened to as many as 68 – ran out, the FAA began cranking out registered dismissal letters by the thousands, to take effect after a one-week period.
- From federal courts, the government immediately sought and obtained 52 separate temporary restraining orders against the strike. Five local PATCO leaders were jailed on August 5 for defying those back-to-work decrees. Judges levied fines against the controllers' union that could soar to some 32 million dollars within a week. Courts also froze the union's 3.5-million-dollar strike fund. Criminal prosecutions were prepared against at least 38 strike leaders.
- On the administrative level, the Federal Labor Relations Authority moved to revoke PATCO's right to bargain with the government for air-traffic controllers. At the same time, the FAA put supervisors and instructors on long shifts, called in retired controllers and some 500 military air-traffic specialists to help maintain aviation activity. It also prepared to hire thousands of replacements for training at the FAA Academy.

Meanwhile the FAA's Helms ordered traffic cut in half until September 8 at 22 of the busiest airports, but permitted all normal flights at other facilities. Scarcely three days after it all began, Lewis declared the strike over, so far as the government was concerned....

While some labor leaders were miffed at Poll's "shoot from the hip" approach to confronting the government, they also were outraged at Reagan's retaliatory actions. AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland accused Reagan of "brutal and unnecessary overkill" designed to break both the strike and the union....

"A Moral Issue." By all accounts Reagan's reaction was based less on political considerations than philosophical anger. "The President considers this a moral issue," Lewis told National Public Radio. "He feels these people took an oath of office. They haven't lived up to their responsibilities to the American public."

"We are all losers—the public, the controllers and the government," remarked Lewis. "We are not gloating over a victory."

Persisting Questions of History

Defining Public Interest. With the rise in public employment, actions by labor unions are more likely to have obvious effects on the "public interest." Even during earlier periods of history, however, some strikes were seen as threatening to the public interest. For example, some government officials said the Pullman strike threatened the mails and free trade. Workers were asked not to strike during World War II because winning the war was clearly in the public interest. Based on what you have read, try to develop a definition of the public interest. Consider what goods and services are essential to public well-being, as well as what demands by workers might protect the public interest.

Identifying Grievances. Make a list of the air traffic controllers' grievances. Determine whether you think each grievance was a legitimate cause to take action against the government. What criteria did you use to determine legitimacy?

Balancing the Public Interest and Rights of Workers. Based on what you have read about the PATCO strike, do you think public employees should have the right to strike? If so, how do you think the public should be protected in the case of strikes by public employees with responsibility for protection of the public safety? If not, how might the union work with an employer to gain better working conditions or wages?

Resolving Disputes. In 1987, a new union of air traffic controllers was formed. The union's coordinator said he did not believe the current air traffic controllers would ever approve a strike or other illegal job action. However, they did have complaints about working conditions, mandated overtime, and outdated equipment. What advice would you offer the new union and the FAA about resolving disputes in a way that would protect their own interests, as well as those of the public?

Review, Reflection, and Research

Taking a Stand on Strikes and the Public Interest

Should all workers have an equal and unlimited right to strike? Or should limits be placed on the rights of some workers to strike? The line below represents a *continuum,* ranging from an absolute right to strike to no strike rights at all. Below this continuum is a list of occupations. Indicate, by putting the letter of the occupation on the line, the degree to which you think each occupation's right to strike should be limited. Be prepared to support your ratings in class discussion.

Absolute right to strike anytime workers have a grievance

No right to strike despite serious grievances

a. school teachers
b. police officers
c. workers in a defense industry
d. radio-television announcers
e. dairy farmers
f. workers in a toy factory
g. workers in a clothing factory
h. gas station attendants
i. government clerks
j. nurses
k. professional athletes
l. restaurant workers
m. soldiers
n. commercial airline pilots

Identifying Workers' and Employers' Concerns

What are the basic reasons for conflict among workers, unions, employers, and the public today? A community survey can provide a first-hand look. Talk to workers in various occupations, asking them to list, in order of importance, grievances about their work. They might be asked about such things as wages, hours, working conditions, vacations and benefits, and opportunities for advancement.

Then talk to officials of a labor union. Find out what some of the union's major problems are and what it has done to try to solve these problems. What are the apparent reasons for its successes and failures?

Then talk to employers in the area, asking again for a list of company grievances, in order of importance, about workers.

After the survey is made, discuss these three questions:

1. To what extent do the values and goals of workers, union officials, and employers today compare or contrast with the values and goals of their counterparts in the mid-19th century?

2. To what extent do workers, union officials, and employers agree on the problems of employment? Does the union accurately represent the workers' point of view? Does the employer understand what bothers workers? Do workers understand the employer's problems?

3. To what extent are workers, unions, and employers working together for what you would call the public interest? To what extent do their goals clash with the public interest?

Issues in Today's Workplace

Layoffs, concessions, and declining membership have caused unions to place new emphasis on family-related issues as a way of recruiting new members, especially among women workers. Women now make up half of the American work force, and they may fill up to 65 percent of all new jobs in the 1990s. Said a labor negotiator, "If unions are to grow and attract women, they've got to change the nature of the demands based on the male wage structure thirty years ago."

The following are some family issues unions are addressing:

- The need for affordable day care
- Flexible benefits plans
- Flexible hours
- Job sharing
- Right to receive messages from home

Choose one of these issues to research. Find out why it is an issue and how unions have attempted to address the issue in negotiating with management. Report to the class on what you feel may be "grievances" of the future, based on your research and trends in the workplace.

Thinking About Thinking

As you worked on this unit, how well did you do at thinking about both the issue at hand and the way in which you were discussing the issue? Write a brief essay analyzing what you think you did well and where you could still improve.

To order this unit or for more information on the Public Issues Series, contact:

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THE RISE OF ORGANIZED LABOR: WORKERS, EMPLOYERS, AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST TEACHER'S GUIDE

Public Issues Series Social Science Education Consortium 1989

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The Public Issues Series

The *Public Issues Series* was originally conceived of by the Harvard Social Studies Project of the 1960s and 1970s. The major purpose of the series—both then and now—is to help students analyze and discuss persisting human dilemmas related to public issues. We would emphasize that the term *public issues* is not synonymous with *current events*. By public issues, we mean problems or value dilemmas persisting throughout history and across cultures. The situations of Christian martyrs in Rome, a bureaucrat in Nazi Germany, a slave in 19th-century America, or an Ethiopian refugee in Texas in 1988 all represent important public issues. We believe that most of the important current events can be clarified by reference to public issues in other places and other times. Thus, all the units in the series suggest parallels between historical illustrations of persisting human dilemmas and present issues in the United States and the world.

The units in the series use historical, fictional, and contemporary situations. They also assist students in using a structured approach to issues analysis and in developing the skills of reasoned discussion. The units are not designed to be followed mechanistically through every question. There is no critical sequence of exercises. Teachers should view the materials provided as possible strategies for developing discussion of public issues and should pick and choose among the materials according to their own goals. In making selections, teachers should note that students will need information from other sources to discuss some questions intelligently; this may be a factor in deciding whether to have students address those particular questions.

As classes work with the materials, it is important to give students a sense of progress by periodically summarizing where the case material and discussion have taken them, particularly in terms of their discussion skills and the central, or necessary, questions of the unit.

The Necessary Questions

This unit on labor focuses on the following organizing questions:

- What legitimate claims or grievances may workers express against their employers? What methods may workers legitimately use to influence the employer's policies?
- In what way may the activities of organized workers and of employers conflict with the public interest? In what ways should the power of an employer be restricted by law? In what ways should laws restrict the powers of organized workers?
- What are the effective ways of resolving disputes between workers and employers for their best interests and the best interests of the general public?

Primary source documents, secondary sources, and fictional accounts are used to acquaint students with how these questions have manifested themselves in various periods of U.S. history. The first section of the book looks at the changing nature of work following the industrial revolution. Presenting the views of workers and a manager, the focus then shifts to labor's efforts to organize and the responses of business and government. Students then examine challenges facing labor today.

Analyzing the Issues

In addressing the necessary questions of the unit, students will grapple with ethical-value questions, definitional issues, and issues of fact-explanation. For example, deciding who is responsible for redressing problems experienced by workers requires students to examine values or beliefs about social responsibility. Addressing the effect of job actions on the public interest requires students to define the "public interest." In examining the economic impacts of strikes, students will be called upon to judge conflicting factual claims.

As students work through these and other issues, they should practice the explicit stating of issues and use of analogy to clarify their positions, as illustrated in the following classroom discussion on "The Battle of the Overpass":

Student 1: How do you feel about Ford's position in this case? Do you think he was right in resisting union organization?

Student 2: Sure. He owned the factory. It was his hard work that gave people jobs.

Student 1: Would you say the same thing about the owners of the steel mills? (*Uses analogy to test student's commitment to principle of property ownership.*)

Student 2: Sure. I know life was tough for the steelworkers, but if they didn't like it they could have quit and gotten another job. (*Position based on assumption that it is worker's responsibility to correct his/her own troubles.*)

Student 1: Then you think a worker fired for trying to organize workers should have simply looked for a new job? (*Tests position with a second analogy.*)

Student 2: Well, the boss had a legal right to fire a worker, but he shouldn't have done it. (*Student makes a distinction between legal rights and moral obligations.*)

Student 1: If the boss has the right to use his/her property in whatever way he/she sees fit, what's wrong with firing an employee who tries to unionize? (*Points out apparent inconsistency in student's position.*)

Student 2: If the employee was a hard and loyal worker, the boss had no good reason to fire and blacklist him or her. (*Qualifies value of employer rights by raising value of worker security earned by loyal employees.*)

Student 1: Then you would agree that some workers should have rights that limit the employer's property rights.

Student 2: Yes, certain kinds of workers. Maybe if a worker proved his or her competence through three years of trial employment, he or she should have the right to keep a job and to join a union, even if this seems to crowd the employer's rights. (*Qualifies position by suggesting conditions under which he would favor employee rights to job security over employer's property rights.*)

Teaching the Unit

Each Public Issues unit can be taught in a variety of ways. The following is one way to approach *The Rise of Organized Labor: Workers, Employers, and the Public Interest.* Activities that introduce skills with which your students are already familiar can be skipped and the skill briefly reviewed.

Note that this booklet is not intended to replace your usual approach to the history of labor, but to enhance and expand on it. If you normally cover the development of labor law in depth, for example, the section "Overview: 1900-1940" can be skipped or used as a quick review of the material you have already covered. You might then use "The Battle of the Overpass" to encourage students to think more deeply about the values labor laws embodied. The exercises in "Review, Reflection, and Research" can be used to evaluate student progress.

Preparing to Teach the Unit. Ask students to recall discussions they have had – either in class or in another setting – in which there were significant differences in opinions. Did they feel the discussion progressed or did it seem to get bogged down or go in circles? Why do they think this might be the case? You may wish to point out that assumptions about the purpose of discussion may sometimes lead to the feeling that it is unproductive. Lack of skill in resolving smaller disagreements may also sidetrack a discussion.

Tell students that they will be participating in a unit on labor; this unit will involve a great deal of discussion. The primary purpose of these discussions will be clarifying and better understanding positions on various issues. As students participate in the unit, they will provide feedback and support to each other in the skills of discussion.

Divide the class into three groups and give each group one of the handouts. Tell students that each of them will be responsible for presenting the material in their handout to two other students. Allow time for reading and group discussion.

Form new groups comprised of one student from each of the original three groups and allow time for sharing. During the remainder of the unit, remind students to apply the material from the handouts in their discussions.

Introducing the Unit. Assign students to read pages 3-5 of the unit. Review with students the methods for supporting or challenging claims related to each type of issue.

Type of Issue	Strategies for Supporting/ Challenging Claims
Ethical-value issue	Use of value-laden language Use of a respected source Prediction of a valued consequence Identification of a conflicting value
Definitional issues	Stipulation Use of a respected source
Fact-explanation issues	Reference to common knowledge Personal observation Use of a respected source Demonstration of consistency with other well-established claims

The Nature of Work. This section focuses on changes in the nature of work brought about the industrial revolution. The first selection looks at the idealistic beginnings in the mills of Samuel Slater. The "Persisting Questions of History" at the end of the section are primarily questions of fact-explanation and definition. You might ask students whether they see a similar "revolution" in the nature of work occurring today because of the predominance of computers in the workplace. This issue is picked up in the "Questions for Conversation" following "The Case of Sara Frowne" in the next section.

That section, "Four Perspectives: The Workers and the Manager," provides students with additional data on which they will be able to base further judgments. Because this section is rather lengthy, you might want to use an alternative to having all students read all four selections. You might, for instance, assign one reading to each group and have them plan dramatic presentations of the material. The entire class could then participate in discussing the "Questions for Conversation" at the end of each selection. The "Persisting Questions" provide opportunities to examine issues related to rights of ownership. For example, the class might examine this question: If the owner has a choice between making greater profits for further investment and paying his workers an adequate wage, is he/she justified in choosing the former? Is there perhaps a network of social responsibility in which all groups are caught and which requires that all groups cooperate? Both employers and workers may be subject to the stress of periodic economic depressions. The "network" concept allows students to look at the issues not only from the point of view of which "side" is right or wrong, but also with the objective of seeking methods by which business and labor might reach an accommodation.

Labor Organizes. This section opens with an overview of unionization efforts from 1840 to 1900. If students are familiar with this material, you may skip this overview or review the material presented in a brief lecture.

Assign students to read "The Problems of Organizing." Point out that Joe Scheiker had a difficult time finding laborers to join the movement, as did other organizers. Although Americans seem to be known for joining thousands of voluntary groups, apathy in public affairs is apparent. One might ask: Under what conditions will people participate in protest or pressure groups? To expand on this theme, students might research activities in various movements (gay rights, environmental, anti-abortion, tax freeze, peace) to try to develop some generalizations regarding motivation behind activism and the conditions most likely to stimulate it. Do the people come from similar backgrounds? Are they of the same generation? What reasons do they give for their involvement? Are there important reasons unrelated to the ostensible cause (for example, fashion, payment)? From this study, a job description for an "organizer" could be developed.

When students begin examining the tactics of organizers and management in the "Persisting Questions," point out some of the criteria students might consider in making judgments about tactics: (1) the relative power positions of the groups, (2) the reasonableness of demands made by a group, and (3) the effectiveness of the tactics. The final "Persisting Question" in this section deals with the idea of a student union. If you believe consideration of this idea could cause controversy in your community, you may wish to discuss the question with your principal before assigning it.

The reading on "The Pullman Strike, 1894" introduces the idea of government involvement in labor-management relations, a theme that is continued in the following section. The second "Persisting Questions" gives students a chance to reflect on their thoughts on the critical questions of this unit. Be sure to allow adequate time for this exercise.

Government and Unions. Like the previous section, this one begins with an overview. If your students have encountered this material on the period from 1900-1940 before, you may skip or briefly review this reading. The overview presents brief definitions of arbitration and mediation. You might have groups role play how the Pullman dispute might have been resolved differently if mediation or arbitration had been used before the job action.

After students have read "The Battle at the Overpass," they will have additional opportunities to evaluate the government's role in labor relations. The final "Persisting Question" deals with possible union demands; it might be instructive to invite a local labor leader and business owner to visit your class to discuss these demands.

Today's Issues. This section begins with the unit's final overview, which focuses on four major topics – the stagnation of union membership, the increased regulation of unions by the government, union involvement in politics, and the changing nature of the economy and work. Some topics that might be used to stimulate further discussion of these issues are:

- In general, union political action supported the Democratic party. However, by the 1980s, Americans had become disgusted by the influence of political action committees, including those associated with labor unions. By 1984, labor's endorsement of Walter Mondale carried with it as many negatives as positives. Why do students think this is true?
- Mobilizing workers for political action has proven difficult. Working class people have been much less likely to register and vote than the more affluent. They are even less likely to participate in political campaigning. Why do students think this might be the case?
- In 1953, the New York State Crime Commission discovered that the International Longshoremen's Association was controlled by racketeers who terrorized union members on the city's wharves and docks. Four years later, Teamsters leader Dave Beck was sent to prison for misappropriating union funds, investing pension money in gambling casinos, bordellos, and saloons. Beck's successor, Jimmy Hoffa, was also jailed for corrupt practices in the early 1960s. How do students think this corruption in big unions affected union members? The general public? Are unions still viewed as corrupt by the public?

The overview ends with a brief discussion of unionism by public employees. This discussion leads into the analogy, which deals with the PATCO strike in 1981. The case covers aspects of all of the critical issues of the unit – the legitimacy of worker grievances, the methods workers may use to influence employers, possible conflicts between the activities of workers and employers and the public interest, and methods of resolving disputes. When students discuss the legitimacy of the controller's grievances, you may wish to share the following information with them. A year after the PATCO strike, a fired air traffic controller wrote to *U.S. News and World Report*, appealing to the FAA to rehire the fired controllers. The writer claimed they were being unfairly punished "due to a 48-hour error in judgment." The magazine asked readers how they felt about the question: Did the punishment fit the crime? The responses they received ran 8 to 1 against the strikers. A Maryland reader said, "They violated a federal law and should have been punished more." From California came this comment: "The whining of the fired air-traffic controllers is much easier for the nation to bear than would have been the keening [wailing] of thousands over the mangled remains of relatives who could have very easily have been killed by controllers' illegal action." A Kentuckian wrote, "I will never believe the stress they deal with is more than that experienced by a nurse required to make life-and-death, split-second decisions in an intensive care unit, who I might add, makes less than $20,000 a year."

Review, Reflection, and Research. These exercises include writing, research, and discussion. You may assign them selectively for completion by individual students or small groups, or they can be used as topics for large-group discussion and reflection on the unit.

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Moving Discussion Forward

People often begin a controversial discussion with spirit and excitement. Then, after a short time, they come to feel that the discussion is bogged down, or simply going in circles. One reason for this may be the assumption that the *only* purpose of discussion is to resolve a disagreement. But it is often just as useful and exciting for people to learn more precisely just where and how they disagree.

Here are some suggestions for making discussion clearer, and for resolving smaller disagreements that may sidetrack the larger discussion.

1. **Working toward an agenda**. An *agenda* is a list of issues that a group agrees to consider in the course of a conference or discussion. When a group begins discussing a complicated situation, different people see different issues. Each usually talks about the issue he or she thinks most important. Participants may be *insensitive* to the issues that others see. One way of dealing with this problem is to list all the issues that seem important. The participants in the discussion then decide which issues they wish to discuss, and in what order.

Having made this decision, members of the group can remind one another of what points are relevant and what points are not. If someone jumps to the third issue when the group is still entangled in the first, he/she can be reminded that his/her contribution is not relevant at this point.

2. **Stipulation.** What happens when members of a group begin to see clearly that there are factual points in a discussion where they cannot possibly reach agreement because of the lack of available evidence? Under these circumstances it is sometimes possible to *stipulate* that a controversial claim is true. This is done for the sake of exploring the implications that will follow.

3. **Concession.** Perhaps the hardest thing for a person to do in an argument is to admit that a point he or she is defending is weak or needs to be modified. If one looks at discussion as a place to test one's point of view and to distinguish between justifiable and unjustifiable claims, it is reasonable to discard or concede those ideas that do not hold up. It is reasonable to *qualify* those claims that are too broad and sweeping. Concession and qualification are not simply signs that a discussant has "lost" a point; they are also signs that the participant is reasonable and sensitive to evidence.

4. **Summarizing the trend.** Discussions that include several participants dealing with a controversial problem can quickly become confused and confusing. Issues may be raised, dropped, and raised again. Some points may be conceded. Facts and definitions may be stipulated. Claims may be refuted, only to appear again at another point. For this reason it is important to ask frequently, "Where has the discussion come, and where is it going?" and to summarize clearly the state of affairs. It is a good idea to take notes (with the help of a chalkboard or overhead projector) to outline the major issues. Discussions that revolve around unrelated fragments are most likely to go nowhere.

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Roadblocks to Productive Discussion

Our major objective in conducting discussions on controversial public issues is to construct reasoned arguments or justifications for the stands we take on public policies. Usually, however, this cannot be accomplished if the discussion process breaks down. Discussions may falter for different reasons.

- The participants may have little or no *interest* in the controversial situation and may be unable to see how it is relevant to their lives.
- The participants may have such *deep interests* and convictions that it is difficult for them to be objective and reasonable about the topic.

While these difficulties are hard to remedy, there are a number of other shortcomings in the discussion process that can be handled if participants are sensitive to them. Five such shortcomings, or "roadblocks," are described here:

1. **Failure to listen and pursue issues systematically.** Participants in a discussion commonly spend much of their time daydreaming and "tuning" in and out of conversation. But discussion requires the same kind of attention and sustained effort as does difficult reading. Without this kind of attention, the discussion may easily end up going haphazardly around in circles as a series of drifting fragments.

2. **Monopolizing the conversation.** A second major roadblock to good discussion occurs when one or two people do all the talking. In school, for example, it is common for the teacher to do most of the talking. This is not discussion; it is speech-giving. This is obviously a delicate problem. Each participant must, therefore, be sensitive to his or her own behavior and discipline him/herself.

3. **Proof by repetition.** A person challenged in a discussion may try the common strategy of restating a position. He or she may be doing this repeatedly, perhaps using different and more persuasive words each time. But they all boil down to essentially the same claim. Thus the proper next step in the discussion is for the participant to *give reasons* and support for the reasons, rather than continuously repeating the initial position.

4. **Personal attack.** Directing arguments against the personality or character of other members of the group rather than against their arguments usually distracts the group from dealing with the issues over which they disagree.

5. **Worrying about winning the argument.** Anyone who takes a position and begins to defend it soon invests something of his or her reputation in the argument. But it is also important for a participant to see argument as a chance to clarify, strengthen, and perhaps modify a point of view to make it more defensible. Hanging on to a position simply to avoid loss of face may stifle or "hang up" the discussion. Moreover, concession – giving in on small points that are less defensible – tends to strengthen rather than weaken a person's major argument.

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Ideas for Practicing Discussion Skills

What's happening now? That question, posed during brief stops at key points in the dialogue, is one of the most direct paths to productive discussion. The general questions below should be asked to determine if the discussion is moving along productively or "going in circles."

These questions can be used in a number of ways to take stock of the *problems* and *direction* of the discussion. Here are three ways:

1. **Evaluation by participants.** After several statements in the discussion, the participants halt briefly at a key point to decide "what's happening now." They evaluate their own discussion either orally or in writing. they note, for example, that discussion is moving ahead because a participant has just stated an issue clearly. Or they point out that discussion has bogged down because one participant keeps restating his or her argument.

2. **An evaluation panel** can be set up by dividing the discussion group into two sections. One group is designated the "discussion section." The other group is designated the "evaluators section."

The discussion section carries on normal dialogue and argument about the issue at hand. The evaluators section rates the discussion by identifying general and specific points that were productive or unproductive.

3. **Creative evaluation groups** can be established to write dialogues and ask other groups to identify which statements in the written discussion are helpful or unhelpful, and why. It is useful to do this either on an overhead projector or a tape recorder, so that the evaluating group has a record from which to work. The written dialogues can be created to show problems as well as positive features of discussions. For example, discussions might be taped that show sensitivity or clarifying statements, or they might show discussants getting off the track by making irrelevant statements.

1. What issues were discussed?

2. What positions were taken, and by whom?

3. Was agreement reached on any issues? Which ones?

4. What things happened that helped move the discussion along?

5. What things happened that bogged the discussion down or made it unproductive?

6. What things should be discussed next? Why?